

Friday Sermon about Ramadhan and Prayers

Delivered by Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad^{ra}, the Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
May 9th, 1986.

NOTE: Amtul Mussawir Mansoor takes full responsibility for any errors or miscommunication in the translation of the Friday Sermon.

Hudhur^{ra} recited Sura al-Fatiyah followed by verse 186 and 187 of Sura al-Baqarah:

The month of Ramadan is that in which the Qur'an was sent down as a guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and discrimination.ⁱ Therefore, whosoever of you is present *at home* in this month, let him fast therein. But whoso is sick or is on a journey, *shall fast* the same number of other days. Allah desires *to give* you facility and He desires not hardship for you, and that you may complete the number, and that you may exalt Allah for His having guided you and that you may be grateful. And when My servants ask thee about Me, say: 'I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he prays to Me. So they should hearken to Me and believe in Me, that they may follow the right way.' (Al Quran 2:186-187)

Some translators and commentators sense some shortcoming in the first part of the translation of these verses. They explain that since the Quran was revealed over the span of 23 years, how can it be said to have been revealed in the month of Ramadhan? They say that since this disagrees with factual evidence, this verse should not be translated this way. It is misleading and not supported by narrations. Another meaning for **فِيهِ** is "regarding it" and this is why a suitable translation could be, "The month of Ramadan is that regarding which the Qur'an was sent down as guidance for mankind."

Some translators and lexicographers consider the above interpretation, 'regarding which, the Quran was sent down' as correct but offer two explanations for alternative translation, 'the month of Ramadan is that in which the Qur'an was sent.' Firstly, the first verses of the Quran were revealed during the month of Ramadhan. That is why

أُنزَلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ could be translated as 'in which the revelation of the Quran initiated.' The second reason is a Hadith, which indicates that in every blessed month of Ramadhan, Hadhrat Gabriel, the Arch angel would appear to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, may peace be on him and review as much of the Quran that had been revealed, at that time. Then when the entirety of the Quran had been revealed, its complete review was also completed during the month of Ramadhan. From this, the commentators conclude that the literal translation of this verse is also correct since the whole of the Holy Quran was revealed during the month of Ramadhan.

Regarding the second verse also, some translators and commentators sense a difficulty and have, in various ways, come up with a solution. Allah says:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ
Me, say: 'I am near ...' أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ 'I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to Me ...'"

The shortcoming some feel in the translation of this verse is that not all prayers are accepted. Many prayed, be it in the jungles, cities or deserts. They prayed in their own unique way but to no avail, their prayers weren't answered, and they became disillusioned or misguided. Such experiences are prevalent throughout the world. Their love for their mother, drove them to pray for the life of their mother; their love for their children, drove them to pray, for the life of their children; they were in debt; they prayed for the alleviation of their suffering, but the prayers were not answered. It is important to understand the accurate meaning of this verse. Otherwise, it is disappointing to see that the perfect man announced these divinely revealed words to the world, but these words did not prove to be right. The verse seems problematic only when one reads the first part of the verse, and not in its entirety. When you combine the meaning of the second part of the verse,

فَلَيْسَتْجِيْبُوا لِي وَلَيُؤْمِنُوا بِنِعْلَهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ
'So they should hearken to Me and believe in Me, that they may follow the right way,' the mystery is solved.

Sometimes the second part is understood to mean that 'since I (God) listen to their prayers, therefore they should also obey Me.' But, this can also be interpreted as a conditional statement that 'if they will follow me I will listen to their prayers.' So, the interpretation can also be, as if Allah is saying: "I accept prayers and always stay close to humans. I am never in a state in which I am far or inaccessible to My servants. Anyone who has a fear that his voice doesn't reach Him, and if his voice doesn't reach Him, he will be destroyed, need not worry. I not only answer and accept his prayers, but I am very close and intimate to each and every servant of mine. There is not a moment for My servants, where My Mercy and acceptance of prayers and deliverance is delayed. However, the clarification needed here is: فَلَيْسَتْجِيْبُوا لِي meaning, that the condition is, that 'they should listen to My Commandments, and implement them. If you do not listen to My Commandments that I send you and you don't reply with 'Labaik' (I obey), when I guide you to the right path and you turn away, then why do you assume that when you need me, I should reply and come running for your help?"

The contrast between God and man cannot be expressed in words or actions; it is the paradox between finite and infinite. So, it is not possible to have a suitable metaphor to describe human relationship with the Divine. Therefore, when man needs to understand the word of God, it has to be expressed in terms of human reality. Having said this let us create an example for the sake of communication. For example, consider that a servant doesn't answer his master; the servant doesn't listen to the master's command, but when the

servant is in need of his master, he expects his master to listen and help him at once. But this cannot be! Yet in our dealing with Allah our wishful approach takes such a dimension.

The reality is that man's behavior tells us, till what measure his prayers will be granted. Man's anguish, reveals how near he is to his God. The Promised Messiah (a.s.) has thrown great light on the topic of 'prayer' and explained the above verses to the minutest detail. Allah out of His immense generosity does not demand complete submission before responding to His servants. Allah starts hearing prayers of the supplicants in whatever sphere of life they submit to Him. This is a great glad tiding for every believer as he or she enters the month of fasting.

The good news is that Allah doesn't wait that man should submit completely and perfectly before He starts listening to the prayers of his individual servant. His Grace begins to cover men in whatever daily activity they have started responding to Allah's teachings. His Grace and Blessing is also proportionate to their submission in the individual sphere of life. This is the root cause of human hope in the institution of prayers. But, man does not behave so graciously. Going back to the worldly example above, there are some servants who listen to every command of the master and try their best to please their master. But, when they make a minute mistake, the master becomes so angry that the servant's lifelong services are wasted and the master doesn't render them back. This is how man behaves towards other men. It is, indeed, ironic that man expects God to listen to him, even when he doesn't listen to any of the commandments of God. However, God's mercy is magnanimous. He is so near to man that He treats man better than how man treats man. His servants don't obey a thousand of His Commandments and obey only one of them, and He becomes near to them in the sphere of the Commandment that they obeyed. What amazing Divine Mercy and Providence!

Once, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, may peace be on him, narrated a parable of three men who were trapped in a cave. Due to a storm, a rock had blocked the mouth of the cave and there was no opening from where they could exit. One by one, the three of them prayed: "O God, remember the time I performed this good deed for Your sake, so in return please cause the rock to move aside a little." After examining their entire lives, each of them can only find one good deed to present to God, a deed without self indulgence, without showing off, without selfish reasons, but purely for altruistic reasons. Of course, God didn't respond back that your entire life has been wasted, you have nothing, I have bestowed everything upon you but you rejected all my commandments and today you are remembering that one little good deed. You are drowning in my favors, and you are remembering that deed and claim that it still needs to be rewarded? Allah, who is most Merciful, does not reject even his minuscule deed. He honors the expectation of the three, starting with the first petitioner and commands the rock to move and the rock slides a little. But, they still couldn't put their head through it. Then the second man also remembered his good deed. There is a delicate matter that the Holy Prophet Muhammad is bringing out in this parable that is missed by many of those who want to learn a lesson from this Hadith or parable. If one of the three in the parable had three good deeds, then why would there be a need to mention three men in this Hadith? It shows that from their entire lives, they could only find one good deed, which wasn't heavy enough in scales, to bring about their complete rescue.

The second man presents himself before God and says: "I also remember my good deed which I have done for Your sake" and the rock slides again. But they are still trapped. If he had another good deed in store, he would've presented it to God, and the rock would've moved enough. But he couldn't present anything.

Then the third man, who was trapped in the cave, remembered his good deed and presented it before God. The good deeds presented by the three are not even worth calling good deeds, even with a long stretch. Their definition of good deeds included restraining themselves from sinning. This is like when someone says that I could've killed you at one point, but I didn't, so I performed an act of kindness. These kind of good deeds were mentioned by the three men who were trapped in the cave, but God's Grace even counted those deeds as good. The lesson I learned from فَلِيُشْتَجِيبُوا لِنِّي is that God's grace and nearness is so Great, that even if you don't obey every commandment of God, even then God answers and accepts your prayers, in certain spheres. If this were not true, then millions upon millions of men, who have sinned, should not even have one of their prayers accepted. But experience and reason indicates, God doesn't disappoint us in matters of acceptance of prayers. This is indeed the testimony of those who are initiated in matters of faith. But, do not be satisfied with just average performance. Seek excellence in the matters of faith.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, may peace be on him, has given us the code to understand the mystery of prayers. It is now our responsibility to strive and present ourselves affirming to God Almighty. As a result, our prayers will gain strength. The more we submit ourselves to obey Allah's commandments, the greater will be our experience of the acceptance of prayers. This also applies to God's nearness. God is everywhere. He is not just in the East or the West, the North or the South. He is Omni-present. To attain God's nearness means that one lives one's life in the ever presence and awe of Allah. This presence cannot be measured in terms of east, west, and north, south, left and right. Allah says, اَفَلَمْ يَرَى قَرِيبٌ

am very near.' If your prayer is not accepted, then you have drifted apart, because I by my very nature am close by. So worry about yourself, focus on your state of mind and actions. So if you are close to Omnipresent God then you have grown near to Him, in a spiritual sense. Otherwise, you may be wandering away from Allah. But if you would like to come near Allah, you will not have to cover any distances; rather start responding to Allah's teachings. Just one decision will cover all the distances, and you will suddenly be in presence of Allah. This is the meaning of اَفَلَمْ يَرَى قَرِيبٌ 'I am very near.'

The Promised Messiah (as) relates that the best interpretation of this verse of the Holy Quran is not that you ask Him for your needs and He is near, but in actuality it's that from God, you ask for God Himself and His nearness. Seek Him and then you'll see if He is near. The more you seek Him, the greater the closeness you will experience. The Promised Messiah (as) mentions this subject in one of his poems: "O God, in both worlds, You are my friend. What am I going to do in both of these worlds? Whatever I seek from You, is You. My intent is to find You."

The Promised Messiah (as) has brought to light an excellent pearl in this verse. He espouses that ‘أُحِبُّ دَعْوَةَ الْمُّدَاعِ’ I answer the prayer of the supplicant...’ in essence means that whosoever seeks God, all of his prayers are accepted. This is a very profound interpretation. This prayer of seeking the infinite God includes all the other prayers. Man becomes very near to God, when he seeks God from God.

In the blessed month of Ramadhan, give preference to this prayer over all the other prayers. May God bestow acceptance of this prayer, and as a result, He accepts the other prayers also.

When we accept God’s commandments, then God accepts our prayers. We should instill in ourselves the ability to fulfill His wishes. We would have to pray for this ability. It is very easy to say that ‘O God, from You, I only seek You.’ But in reality, this prayer is difficult because it is difficult to bring emotions and spirit in line with it. A normal man cannot even comprehend how difficult this prayer is even though it’s only a few words. You can plainly say, ‘O God, I only seek You,’ but you need the wish and the desire to seek Him in your heart. If you seek Him without the love and desire, who will come? Why would He answer, if there is no love or desire in your heart for Him?

People ask their beloved ones to come and visit and even when there is love, they still won’t come. But, a wise man rather than doubting the beloved may doubt himself and may assume that the reason may be because of how he invited them. He thinks, ‘If maybe I had increased my standard of invitation, they wouldn’t have refused my invitation.’ There is wisdom in his thought.

Ghalib, an Urdu poet, has said:

“I call you, oh my beloved, come and visit,
But oh my emotional and desperate heart,
Create a compulsion in the heart of my besought,
That she has no choice but to render my desire.”

There is deep wisdom in these verses of Ghalib. Some poets allege that their heart’s desire is true but the one they admire doesn’t listen to them. But there are others who say that the error lies in their desire. Their desire is void of passion and strength. If their passion were commendable their destination would not be far! This subject is elegantly communicated in the verse above.

When the Promised Messiah makes this prayer, it is accepted because it is the prayer of the Promised Messiah. It is accepted because his life is a proof that every word of this prayer is true. From childhood till old-age, he didn’t ask for anything except for this desire to seek Him. He sacrificed everything for this desire. Then this prayer was born and strengthened. As a result, there can be no other response but that *إِنِّي قَرِيبٌ* (I am near). If this prayer is completed with such truthfulness of the heart, there is no doubt that it will get accepted.

There is long distance that you must cover, and once you cover that distance, then you'll understand the subject of nearness to God.

So pray that "O God, please instill in us the true desire to seek You and with this true desire, to perform those good deeds which exalt us."

In another verse of the Holy Quran, this subject has been further elaborated. Declaration of faith does reach God, but it is the good deeds that make faith acceptable in the eyes of Allah. Without energy, how can faith be exalted? For example, airplanes are professionally built, but if there is no gas, how will they fly? Likewise, your prayers get their fuel from your good deeds. From your deeds, you gain strength and then you'll see how high you can soar?

As I concentrate on these verses of the Holy Quran, I am amazed by its greatness and my head bows down. There is no other religion of the world which can present a book like the Holy Quran and provide as much scientific evidence as the Holy Quran does. It is correct that God did send down the books of the other religions as well, but He took into consideration, the state of man, when these books were sent.

The revelation that is the Holy Quran that was sent down to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, may peace be on him, reflects very closely his high status. This glorious book captures and occupies the heart and minds of every honest seeker. Likewise, the greatness of the Holy Prophet Muhammad captures the heart and occupies it. This magnificent book could not have been sent down to anybody except the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It is a perfect and complete book. It is written with such detail, coherence, and knowledge that one is amazed by it. It is a fact that the scientific knowledge gained today by long experiments, were foretold 1400 years ago, if not in greater and complete detail, at least in encapsulated form. If you focus and concentrate on such verses, you will see the deeper and hidden meanings.

If there is a need to understand the subject of prayer, the verses of the Holy Quran, the guidance and example of Holy Prophet Muhammad, and the spiritual books of the Promised Messiah (as) serves as an oasis. One should pray that, "O God, bestow on us the knowledge of prayer, and may You help us in seeking You, and bestow on us the manner and fervor of seeking You. Without this fervor, all our efforts will go to waste. Not only is there a need of fervor for seeking You, but also the fervor to perform good deeds, so our prayers can be strengthened."

If this prayer is adopted during the month of Ramadhan, and if it is accepted, then in only one month of Ramadhan, thousands of years of good fortunes is bestowed on the seeker. And this is just numbering. In actuality, they cannot be counted. As I have mentioned before, when talking in relation with God, our human terms cannot explain the divine reality. The words are only used so man can understand up to an extent, what God is trying to convey. This is the first prayer that I have brought your attention to. Just for the sake of reminding, I will mention those who need to be remembered in your prayers.

Pray: for mankind; for Islam; for theologians of Islam; for Ahmadiyyat--The true Islam, for Islam-Ahmadiyyat to be seen as one by the world, as we see it as one, and as God sees it as one; for those who have dedicated their lives and their beloved; those who serve the

Jama'at in any capacity; and also the unfortunate ones who have not had the ability to serve the Jama'at; for those who are inviting people towards God; for those who have performed financial sacrifice; and for those who have not enjoyed the blessing of financial sacrifice; martyrs of Ahmadiyyat and their beloveds; for those arrested in the name of God, and their loved ones; for those who have been deprived of the truth because of the government and because of worldly attractions; for those who are overwhelmed with problems; for widows and orphans; for all those who are ill from various illnesses; for sick children, whose physical ailment have become a burden for their loved ones; for people who are attending the sick, who are tested physically and spiritually; for those who have suffered business loss; for those who have been deceived at the hands of a fraud; for the victims of robbery; for those who have lost property as a test from God; for the unemployed who have nothing but their hard work; for those who have God-given wealth but do not utilize it in the best means; for those who's homes are hell-like; for those husbands who are violating the rights of their wives and for those wives who are violating the rights of their husbands; for those mother-in-laws who torment their daughter-in-laws and for those daughter-in-law who torment their mother in-laws; for those brothers and sisters who are in an argument; Pray for all of them.

I would like to bring to attention this prayer to all Ahmadi families:

رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَرْوَاحِنَا وَزُرِّنَا فُرْةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلنَّقِينِ إِمَامًا

Translation: 'Our Lord, grant us of our wives and children the delight of *our* eyes, and make us a model for the righteous. (Al Quran 25: 75)

There is a misconception about this prayer and people assume that this prayer is only for men who are praying for their wives and families. But this is not correct. This prayer is also for the wives, who are praying for their husbands. This prayer should also be taken in light of the prayer mentioned above, about Ramadhan, the main subject of this Friday sermon. If a husband says this prayer with *taqwa* (fear of God), then he should wonder if his prayer deserves to be accepted. Is he performing the obligations which God has placed on him in the sphere of family life? If he is not, then why is he asking for this prayer? How can it be that on one hand, he is not obeying Allah's commandments and on the other hand, he is praying, 'may God grant me this and that.' Whatever he is obligated to do, he refuses but at the same time he doesn't want to be deprived of the rewards! How can such a prayer be accepted?

So both the wives and husbands should recite this prayer. When they recite this prayer in light of the verses I have recited above, pure and virtuous habits will be formed amazingly. And this is ultimately in complete control of God.

On the topic of جوز it is not only referring to husband and wife relation, but any pair of items comes under جوز. In the Holy Quran, the word جوز is used in an extensive manner.

Every creation of the universe has the attribute of جوز. Because of the extensiveness of

this prayer, this prayer can be recited by friends, and by all those who reside in the house. The circle of this prayer can be extremely vast.

This prayer can resolve those matters which seem like they have no solution. A wife may dislike her husband's habits, which disgust her. She has no hope that he can get rid of his habits. A husband may not like how his wife looks or her habits. Neither he can get rid of her habits, nor can she, herself, eliminate her habits. So the prayer, قُرْةَ أَعْيُنٍ (delight of our eyes) has deep underlying wisdom. Sometimes when those habits are not eliminated, then God causes a change of heart and the husband starts admiring that habit, and vice versa. This matter is only in God's hands, and there are real-life examples of this phenomenon.

It is related that once a debate broke out in the king's court. Do mothers love their not-so-beautiful children? To settle this, they gathered all the children of the town and gave the mother of an ugly child a necklace and asked her to place it on the most beautiful child. When she surveyed all the children, row by row, she could not spot the most beautiful child. But when she saw her child, she ran to him and placed the necklace around his neck. The lesson to learn is when God produces this love, and softens the heart, then the not-so-beautiful, start looking beautiful. One should therefore pray for قُرْةَ أَعْيُنٍ (delight of our eyes).

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, may peace be on him relates, "God has captured the heart between these two fingers, and only He can change it. He may turn it in whichever direction He likes." This prayer is the solution to one's personal problems one may have. But if one prays and fulfills this condition: فَلَيَسْتَهِنُوا لِنِ (So they should hearken to Me), and obey Allah's commandments for his own sake, then the supplicant will observe blessings of God shower on him and free him from petty arguments.

Lastly, I ask you to pray for the students and the young girls. Especially pray for those children who reside in Western countries. When Ahmadis moved from India and Pakistan, to the Western countries, the new generation didn't have the love of Ahmadiyyat as they should actually have. They were drifting apart. But by God's grace there was a change of heart. These men, women, young and old were able to inculcate the love of their religion. They developed a sense of urgency and desire to work for the Community. They had started praying for the nearness of God, and to seek only God from God. My heart became heavy when they'd write to me and ask for these prayers. In addition, when young boys and girls start asking for these prayers, my heart becomes full of praise for their attitude. But there are still many, not only in Western countries, but also in Eastern countries, such as India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and many other countries, where negative influence is increasing and there is a great danger for the new generation. So pray regularly for the new generation to bring them closer to God and let them partake in the blessings of the month of Ramadhan. But, of course, not with force, but with love. In this Ramadhan, impart on them the habit of praying. The key to bringing them closer to faith is developing this habit of prayer in them. Pray for them but also ask them to pray and you should pray that 'May God accept their prayers.' There is a profound change in those

children who adopt this habit of praying. Those who experience the acceptance of their prayers as a child, they never forget its enjoyment and pursue it till old-age. I cannot find a better way to save this new generation except by instilling in them, the habit of prayer. And you should pray that 'May God accept their prayers, and make them one of His.'

Make this month of Ramadhan filled with blessings. Pray so much that your soul is satiated as a stomach is filled when one keeps eating. God's blessings are so vast that one cannot completely comprehend them. Not only is it not possible to ask for all of them, but when God shower His blessing, one's strength increases, and there is an in-born desire to seek the Glorious God. Then there is an urgency to seek Him. May Allah make us those who fulfill the objectives of the month of Ramadhan! And remember those unfortunate ones, who are deprived of this blessing. Remember the poor and the unfortunate ones in your prayer. Especially remember those in Pakistan. Pray for the victory of Ahmadiyyat, the victory that God has destined, and not what man assumes as victory, but what God considers as a victory. Remember these prayers as Ramadhan progresses, and I am confident, we will emerge from Ramadhan, with a profound change. Every believer should experience spiritual progress and there is no better season than the month of Ramadhan. There are some who fear this month and some who fear it; because they feel they will not be able to fulfill all its obligations. May Allah help us fulfill these obligations! If we fall in error in fulfilling these obligations, may Allah still shower His blessings upon us! Amen.

ⁱ Discrimination here means criterion by which truth and falsehood are distinguished.