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## **TAQWA: THE PRIZE FOR FASTING RAMADAN**

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God, the Almighty has made Taqwa the prize for fulfilling the fasting of Ramadan. As for the way to fulfill the fasting of Ramadan, we learn from the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him, where he says, “*Whoever fasts Ramadan out of belief (in God’s promise) and out of expectation of a due reward for it, God, the Almighty shall relieve you of your sins past.*” In the light of this hadith, in order to achieve Taqwa as the prize for Ramadan we must fast with two things in our mind: 1) to believe in God’s good promises of His favors that He gives without reckoning and 2) to fast out of duty expecting that God is going to subject us to His reckoning and evaluate our deeds rewarding good for good and wrong for wrong. If we should fast Ramadan with these two approaches together, we shall surely win the prize of Ramadan at the end: Taqwa.

### **Categories of Taqwa**

There are two major categories of Taqwa: 1) Zad-al-Taqwa and 2) Libas-al-Taqwa. Zad-al-Taqwa is the provision of taqwa consisting of sources of food and drink provided for us by God in our hearts so that we may not feel hungry or thirsty ever after. Libas-al-Taqwa, on the other hand, is the covering of Taqwa, which once we wear it, we will not feel exposed to cold or heat as one who is naked. It is an armored dress shielding us from the rigors of heat and cold.

### **Benefits of Taqwa**

God, in order to encourage us to seek Taqwa, mentions five benefits out of it:

- 1) Whoever has Taqwa, God will make you a way out (of every impass, when you get stuck). *Chapter Talaq, verse 2*
- 2) He will provide for you Rizq (sustenance) whence you least expect it (beyond calculation). *Chapter Talaq, verse 3*
- 3) He will make all your affairs smooth and easy. *Chapter Talaq, verse 4*
- 4) He will deliver you from all your iniquities (sinful burdens). *Chapter Talaq, verse 5*
- 5) He will accord you a magnificent reward (in return for your good deeds). *Chapter Talaq, verse 5*

### **Taqwa and the Way**

The way is the way of God known as the way of Shukr, the way of Gratitude (Chapter Insaan, verse 3). To walk this way consists in making public acknowledgement of God’s bounties, publicizing His blessings and inviting people to confess to their indebtedness to God and offer their gratitude to their Sole Benefactor. Every invitation has however two objectives: 1) to invite people to gratitude, (Shukr, maroof) and 2) to take people away from ingratitude (kufr, munkar). Therefore, whosoever invites people to offer gratitude to God, asks them to cease to be ingrateful to Him, such a person is indeed on the way of God and is called a grateful servant of God (Shakir, Arif) and few are they (Chapter Saba, verse 13).

However, walking the way of God, the way of gratitude is open to those who have won the prize of Taqwa. Only they can succeed on this way and no one else because it is a way that is fraught with many hurdles and adversities. Only a muttaqi - one with Taqwa - equipped with his provisions and garment of Taqwa can survive through it. The wayfarer of Shukr will withstand onslaught by both human elements and natural elements. He will face deprivation from food and water and then the only source of food and drink for him would be his Taqwa. As well when he is exposed to cold and heat elements or human elements the only covering and protection he has would be his Taqwa. Suppose he didn't have Taqwa, he would be stuck, as for those who are furnished with Taqwa, they always have a recourse.

Cold and heat in terms of natural elements carry a literal sense, and in terms of humans they carry a metaphorical sense meaning grief and fear. Humans who are cold-hearted try to instill grief in you and the ones who are hot-hearted are the ones who use fear tactics. In both cases, your Taqwa is your recourse protecting your heart against the aggrieving of the cold-hearted or the terrifying of the hot-hearted.

From all the foregoing we can conclude that any one who is not equipped with Taqwa must not set forth on the way of God (the way of Shukr) lest he gets stranded on the way and not able to go forward nor backward (Chapter Yasin, verse 66-67, Chapter Baqara, verse 20).

### **Further Benefits of Taqwa**

Besides the provisions and garment of Taqwa, God offers more benefits of Taqwa that are essential in assisting the wayfarer to successfully reach his destination. In Chapter Anfaal, verse 29, God enumerates some of those extra benefits of Taqwa, *“O ye who have faith, if ye possessed Taqwa of God (Iman and Ihtisab), God would then provide you with the Furqan, He would relieve you of your sins and He would purify you and God is the only one who is in possession of the magnificent favor.”*

Let us break down these benefits in this verse into the following points:

- 1) He shall grant you Furqan (a light by which you can distinguish between true and the false).
- 2) He would remove away the sins incurred through your misdeeds.
- 3) He would purify you.
- 4) Only He has the magnificent favor and therefore He would grant it to those who possess Taqwa.

Furqan, the distinguishing light is very crucial in this journey on the way of gratitude, so that the wayfarer is able to differentiate between water and a mirage literally and metaphorically. Metaphorically, a mirage refers to false hopes and wishful thoughts that come from the nafs (ego) and Satan and which has no realistic foundation. He must bear in mind that the reward for good is good and for wrong is an equal wrong and that what you sow is what you reap (Chapter Noor, verse 39, Chapter Ra'd, verse 14).

On the other hand, water in the metaphorical sense is the Truth and Truth like water is a symbol of light and growth, it quenches the thirst for the one who is need of water and it irrigates the

land bringing out different kinds of produce for the livelihood of humans and animals. Such is the difference between Truth and falsehood, the good promise of God and the false promise of Satan between wishful thinking and sober thinking. Truth is what benefits you and if you lack it, it is a harm but in falsehood there is no benefit except harm (Chapter Ra'd, verse 17).

Through what has just been discussed above, one can see that Furqan is the first and most important step and the rest follow, because Furqan is what helps us to see the Truth and follow it and as we follow it, the Truth dawns upon us like a rain of Mercy, which provides drink for ourselves and our dependents and waters our crops producing food for us, but also cleansing us internally and externally.

### **Further Corroborations of the Benefits of Taqwa**

These four benefits of Taqwa mentioned earlier in Chapter Anfaal, verse 29, is further corroborated by its pair in Chapter Hadeed, verse 28, *“O ye who have faith, have Taqwa with regards to God and believe in the Apostle then He would grant you a double measure of His Mercy, and would provide for you a light whereby you can walk and would purify you (of your sins) and God is He who forgives sins and is Merciful.”*

This verse like the former can be analyzed into four major points, the double measure of His Mercy: 1) to be relieved from sinful burdens (Takfeer Say-yi-aat) 2) a magnificent reward 3) a light by which to go and 4) purification from sins (Maghfirah).

### **Taqwa ----- Shukr ----- Ridwan**

Each of these in this triad, Taqwa, Shukr and Ridwan can not be comprehended except in relation to the others, which shows us that there is an organic relationship between them. We find Taqwa and Ridwan at both extremities of the line and Shukr as the connector. In other words, Taqwa is the fare without which one is not allowed on board, Shukr is the actual way and Ridwan is the destination (the end and the objective.)

As for the link between Taqwa and Shukr, God says in Chapter Al Imran, verse 123, *“O ye who have Taqwa regarding Allah and then perhaps you would attain to gratitude).”* God in this verse is telling us that if one wishes to attain gratitude he must first acquire Taqwa. For if Shukr (gratitude) is the way, He who wishes to travel on this way must first prepare himself and take with him things that are necessary for him on the way: a well lit lamp to see by, food and drink to contain hunger and thirst, a covering to offset heat and cold and deliverance from all burdens to allow him to travel fast. These are the things that make-up Taqwa and the traveller can not reach the end without having these in his possession.

By looking at the situation from this point of view we are right in saying that once Taqwa is well acquired it is as though Ridwan is reached, not that Shukr does not count then - that is not possible - but in the sense that once Taqwa is acquired, Shukr is acquired and if Shukr is acquired then Ridwan is secured.

In looking at the whole picture we can deduce that acquiring Taqwa constitutes the most crucial

step because all the other achievements depend on it. Sometimes God says, *“Have Taqwa and you would be granted Mercy”* (Chapter Hujurat, verse 10) or *“Have Mercy and you would be granted success”* (Chapter Al-Imran, verse 130) or *“Have Taqwa and God would grant you knowledge.”* Each of these terms refer to some of those benefits of Taqwa that we have mentioned earlier. Knowledge makes reference to Furqan which means a light by which we could distinguish right from wrong. Mercy refers to the “double measure” of Mercy: 1) is to wipe off sinful burdens and 2) the offer of a magnificent reward and success refers to the Maghfirah, Rahma (Mercy), Falah (Success) and then when Taqwa is secured, one is ready for Shukr. It is in fact related that when Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him, received the glad tidings that he is guaranteed immunity from sins past and yet to come he responded by doubling his worship to the point that his feet were swollen. At this, his wife Aisha said to him, “Why do you need to work so hard when you have been declared free from all sins past and yet to come?” He, peace and blessings of God be upon him, responded, “Should I not be a grateful slave.” The meaning of his response is that, now has come the time for Shukr for me since I have finished acquiring Taqwa (Maghfirah).

So acquiring Taqwa is the end of the first phase which is the preparation and the beginning of the second phase which is the actual move on the way of Allah (Shukr). This was what the Prophet’s response was making reference to.

As for the link between Shukr (gratitude) and Ridwan (God’s pleasure) God says in Chapter Zumar, verse 7, *“If you be ungrateful, Allah indeed is in no need of you and is not however pleased to see His servants be ingrateful, but if you show gratitude He would be pleased with you because of it.”* This surely links Shukr (gratitude) to Ridwan (God’s pleasure). That if you show gratitude to God - by word or action or at least in heart - He would be pleased and your happiness depends on His. As you show gratitude to Him, He would also show gratitude to you. His gratitude makes you happy and your gratitude makes Him happy. Hence God’s name, “Shakir, Shakoor” the One who returns gratitude for gratitude.

### **Shukr and Increase**

In Chapter Al-Imran, verse 7, Allah says, *“And then your Lord solemnly declared, that if you show gratitude I would give increase and if you show ingratitude, severe is my punishment.”* The word increase in this verse is another word for “Ridwan” - pleasure and happiness. I will increase you means I will be pleased with you, as so would you be with me. The link word between the two is the word growth. An increase is a growth and a decrease is lack of growth. In fact the root word of Ridwan, “RDI” means to grow to spring up. Therefore the word growth and the word happiness and pleasure have a cause and effect relationship - that we get happy only if we grow and if we are happy it means that we have grown or we are growing.

On the other hand, the word increase/growth is associated with two major concepts in the Quran: 1) Iman (belief, faith) and 2) ‘Ilm (knowledge, measure). With regards to Iman, God says in Chapter Fath, verse 4, *“It is He who sent down sakinah in the hearts of believing men and women so that they increase in Iman (belief) upon belief”* meaning that so they may grow in belief and if they grow in belief they would be pleased with me and I would be pleased with them. In Chapter Tawbah, verse 124, *“Who among you has this caused to increase in Iman?”* a

rhetoric question by the hypocrites.

As for the knowledge, God says in Chapter Taha, verse 114, *“Say, my Lord, increase me in Knowledge.”* Therefore an increase in knowledge is an increase in appreciation and then the pleasure of God. All other types of increase in the positive sense of the word stem from these two: Iman and Knowledge. At times the word Hudah (guidance) is used to describe one or both of them. In Chapter Muhammad, verse 17, *“And those who had the guidance we increase them in guidance and gave them their Taqwa.”* The word guidance in the verse may mean either or both, Iman (faith) and ‘Ilm (knowledge).

### **Taqwa and Istiqamah (Uprightness)**

Istiqamah which means uprightnes is also another result of Taqwa in the sense that Taqwa means a feeling of satisfaction and sufficiency. A heart that is unfulfilled cannot help looking for more and therefore turns left or right or far ahead. Such a heart is not moving in a straight line and cannot be called upright. Looking left or right is wavering and looking beyond is called transgression. What then causes the heart to waver and transgress is a lack of Taqwa. When Taqwa enters into the heart it feels fulfilled and automatically becomes still and grounded. That stillness and good grounding of the heart is known as istiqamah (uprightnes).

In Chapter Hud, verses 112-113, God describes istiqamah by two terms: 1) be upright and do not transgress and 2) be upright and do not come short. If you are in either excess or short coming you have breached the rule of istiqamah (uprightnes). However, it is by no means possible for a soul to be upright unless it is endowed with Taqwa, which is a fulfillment that is placed within the soul itself so that it has no need to look for it anywhere else. Once there is no need for the soul to look anywhere else for fulfillment it becomes still (sukoon) and well-grounded (mutma’innah) and both sukoon and mutma’innah are called istiqamah (uprightnes). God says in Chapter Najm, verse 48, *“Is it (Allah) who gives fulfillment (to the soul of the servant) and is it He who then causes him to be upright.”* We see that uprightnes, the effect follows the fulfillment which is the cause. There is no way we can cause some one to become upright until and unless we first cause him to be fulfilled at heart.

This fulfillment of the soul called Taqwa consists of two things: 1) Iman (faith) and 2) ‘Ilm (knowledge). Iman is like water and coolness (shade) for the soul and ‘Ilm (knowledge) is like food and warmth for our soul. In other words, Iman protects our soul from cold and hunger. The soul is thus solidified from all angles and the word of Taqwa is complete.

### **The Sun and the Stars**

Stars are the representative symbol of Iman which means that stars and Iman bear the same content, namely: water which is life and coolness which is sukoon (tranquility) and sakan (a house where shade and coolness are found). Another common aspect between Iman and stars is parity and unity. This means that Iman happens only through the interaction between a pair and that interaction is called union. No Iman exists in separation or isolation. A minimum requirement of Jama’ah (group) must be fulfilled to allow Iman to kick in and by virtue of interaction between a group of people - at least a pair - Rahma (Mercy) is activated and

attracted towards the group. Hence, the Prophetic tradition, “Al Jama’ah, Rahma” unity is Mercy and unity begins with two together and upward (Chapter Rum, verse 21).

Similarly, stars also operate in the context of pair relationships, such a pairing might occur between a star and another star or a star and a human soul. Therefore, whenever Almighty Allah has willed to introduce anyone into His Mercy, He would dispatch a star unto Him. That particular star would lower down (tadally) until it reaches the person concerned. Then the two are linked together securely by the permission of God (Chapter Takweer, verse 57: Chapter Shams, verse 57) and thereafter the next phase begins: the ascension. The star and the soul as its pair are lifted gently but firmly stage by stage (Chapter Furqan, verse 45-46). What is described in verse 45 as a shadow refers to the soul in its benighted state. When God chooses to introduce it into His Mercy, He would send down a star to liase with it, at this point the soul - who like a shadow before was turning from side to side, comes to a standstill. This stillness is under the influence of its union with the star and next the ascension begins. The soul at this point have had a true experience of Iman.

The following step deals with the procedure of exposing the soul to knowledge (‘Ilm) the representative symbol of which is the sun (Shams). The soul that has been revived by the stars and provided with water and coolness however is lacking some fundamentals of life namely food and warmth. That food and warmth is provided by the sun, the symbol of knowledge. The first initiation led by the star is called the initiation of Mercy (Rahmah) while the second initiaion is known as the initiation of peace (salam). Some souls are initiated only into one or the other and there are those that are initiated into both and it is those who have completed the word of Taqwa.

Once the person is initiated into mercy and then into peace (Dar-as-Salam) he is given his Taqwa and he then begins his quest for the third initiation, namely initiation into Ridwan (45-46).

Each of these three initiations requires a means:

- a) Initiation into Mercy (Rahmah) requires Iman (belief)
- b) Initiation into Peace (Salam) requires ‘Ilm (knowledge)
- c) Initiaion into God’s Pleasure (Ridwan) requires Shukr (gratitude)

### **Shukr and Takbeer**

Every reality within the heart has its outward manifestation which is the proof thereof. Taqwa is within the heart, its proof is Ta’dheem. Ta’dheem means the demonstration of sincere reverence and respect towards God or things that are associated with Him: *“Such (is his state): and whoever holds in honour the symbols of Allah, (in the sacrifice of animals), such (honour) should come truly from piety of heart” (Chapter Hajj, verse 32)* . This show of reverence and respect stems from the realization of God’s magnificence.

Furthermore, Shukr begins from the heart and the proof by which it is manifested outwardly is takbeer. Takbeer means to *exalt* God and extol His ascendance above every thing. This *exaltation* stems from the realization of God’s ascendance above every thing. Satan, the enemy of God and man is daunted by Takbeer.

In a Prophetic tradition, Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him says: *“Satan takes to flight whenever he hears Adhaan (because of Takbeer).”*

Ta'dheem and Takbeer are therefore the two utmost realizations that the slave could aspire to. As for Ta'dheem it is the realization of the absolute comprehensiveness of God's Mercy and Peace (Chapter Ghaafir, verse 7). When this realization is reached you would see God's Mercy and Peace around and about everything. Nothing can transcend His Mercy and Knowledge.

As for Takbeer, it is the realization of the absolute transcendence of God, above and beyond everything. You would then see everything low and humble in the face of His towering presence (kibryaa) as much as you see everything weak and tiny in the face of a magnificent presence (adhamah). Thus, in a prophetic narration, Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him said: God, the Almighty says, *“Magnificent (adhamah) is my mantle and exaltedness (kibryaa) is my cloak, whoever seeks to compete with me with regards to them, I shall crush him and I don't mind.”*