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Summarized by: Sister S.T.

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I want to take this opportunity to talk about two things. Some of the speakers before me have told you about some practical components of making this Ramaḍān more beneficial and getting the most out of it and getting yourself mentally prepared. I want to take a different angle. I feel that personally many of the rituals in our religion

become practice for us because we do them so many times like prayer, especially. We stop and fail to realize how incredible a gift it is and what an awesome history it has what an amazing tradition we are continuing. Fasting becomes like that. I was raised most of my childhood in the Muslim world, and when a child thinks of fasting, he thinks of really awesome food in the evenings and prayer at night and a month you feel good about with elements of spirituality and worship.

All of these things are true and valid, but I think it is equally important not only to enjoy all of these things but also to appreciate the attitude that Ramaḍān builds in its first recipients. The month of Ramaḍān is a gift from Allāh. The first recipients of this gift were given a *khuṭbah* (sermon) by Allāh that prepared them to really take advantage of this month. I think looking at the *āyāt* from the angle of being a sermon and advice from Allāh Himself to the believing companions is a huge attitude changer.

Fasting – the Beginning

First and foremost, fasting did not begin in Ramaḍān. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) used to fast before Ramaḍān, and there were a few days of the month that were specified. Some scholars argue that in *Sūrat'l-Baqarah* when fasting is mentioned, the first *āyāt* about fasting are not about Ramaḍān but about the fasting that came before Ramaḍān, which was the middle few days of every month that the Prophet and the believers used to fast. Allāh mentioned in that *āyāt*, “Those of you who have *īmān*, fasting was prescribed upon you just as it was upon those who came before you.” This is also a hint that the fasting of the Prophet was similar to the fasting of the people of the Book up until that point.

“...so that you may have *taqwa*.” This *āyah* is from *Sūrat'l-Baqarah*, and the first half of *Baqarah* is about Bani Isra’īl who were given many commandments and Allāh expressed hope for them that it would perhaps make them people of *taqwa*. When the mountain was hovering above them and they were given the Torah in their hands, Allāh told them, “Hold onto what We have given you with all your might. Keep remembering what is in it so that you can have *taqwa*.” I want you to keep this in mind. Bani Isra’īl was given their book, and Allāh told them that if they hold onto it and remember what is in it, then maybe they will get *taqwa*. Now Allāh is talking to us and saying, “You have the month of Ramaḍān. Fasting is prescribed upon you just as it was prescribed on those before you so that you can have *taqwa*.” On the one hand, people are being told to hold to a

book and that will be their means of becoming more conscious of Allāh, and we are being told to hold onto fasting to become conscious of Allāh.

In the next *āyah*, Allāh says, “a limited number of days.” This is the evidence scholars use to say that perhaps this is not talking about Ramaḍān. The Arabic suggests a minimal, and the purpose is to talk about something less than ten days.

Allāh mentions in the same *āyāt* that there are a few number of days, and if for some reason you miss it (i.e. traveling), you can make them up or give *fidyah* and make it up financially. The option was left open for those who couldn’t do their fasts, and Allāh said, “Whoever wants to volunteer and make up those fasts, it is better for him. If you fast, it is better for you if you know.” This language suggests that it is not mandatory. The early ruling was that they could fast or give *fidyah*. This was clearly easier. It was less than a month, and if a day was missed, you could compensate for it financially.

Attitude of Ease

In the next *āyāt* when Ramaḍān is talked about, Allāh says, “Allāh wants ease for you. He doesn’t want difficulty for you.” This is incredible. The month of Ramaḍān is longer and if you miss one, you typically have to make it up (there are exceptional cases where you can give *fidyah*, which you can talk to *fuqahā’* about). The option to pay your way out of a fast is no longer there. In two ways, the fasting is actually harder, but Allāh says He wants ease for you and not difficulty. The moment somebody says, “Fasting just got tougher,” Allāh says immediately that He wants ease for you. This is the attitude Allāh wants us to go into the fast with. Have the attitude that Allāh wants ease for you. And what are we complaining about living in air-conditioned homes and with cold water? An attitude is being sent.

Historical Backdrop

Now I want to talk to you about the historical backdrop that is being set which I think is so significant and powerful. The second half of *Sūrat’l-Baqarah* talks about the Jews and the parallels we have with them. We used to fast the same days as them and prayed in the same direction as them, which changed. Allāh mentions Ibrāhīm (*‘alayhi’l-salām*) in *Sūrat’l-Baqarah* and then the House that Ibrāhīm (*‘alayhi’l-salām*) built and then the commandment comes down that the *qiblah* had to be changed. They had to pray in a different direction and could not pray towards Jerusalem anymore but had to pray towards *Masjid al-Ḥarām*. This was an uproar because the Jews took pride in that being the capital. A new capital was established by Allāh. The Muslims are being distinguished in their identity from the Jewish people. The Prophet used to fast on the same days, and then Allāh told him to fast in Ramaḍān. They are being distinguished in terms of their identity from the previous book in yet another way, and they are being cut off from the previous nation. Look at the progression.

In the first half of the *Sūrah*, Allāh lists the crimes of Bani Isra’īl. He says, “I gave you preference over all other nations.” The *āyāt* proceed and their crimes are listed and it becomes more and more clear why they don’t deserve that status. So they are reminded and the Arabs are reminded that the common beginning is Ibrāhīm who built the House, and his legacy is the one we are supposed to uphold. The children of Isra’īl failed. Then Allāh called us a new *ummah*. Allāh gave



us a new capital and new direction of prayer, and Allāh says, “That is how We made you a middle nation.”

Ramaḍān and the Qur’ān

Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta’āla*) then turned His attention to the fast. He didn’t just tell us to fast 30 days. How did Allāh describe this month Himself? What wording did He use? The word *shahr’l-Ramaḍān* is mentioned. What is the first thing we hear about the month of Ramaḍān? We don’t hear that it is the month of fasting. It is the month in which the Qur’ān was revealed. The most important and climax of what makes us different of the previous nations is that their books have now become obsolete. We don’t look for validation in their books. Allāh says, “This is the month in which the Qur’ān was revealed.” Allāh uses beautiful language, and sometimes when we read the translation, we miss these things.

He defines the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān is defined in many places, but the way it is defined here in this *Sūrah* is truly unique. He says, “It is a guidance for all people.” What did Bani Isra’īl believe? That guidance was specifically for them and not all people. The Qur’ān is guidance for all of humanity. “Absolutely clear, self-evident proofs of guidance in it” means that for the one who wants to explore and find out whether it is the truth or not, it will be self-explanatory if they come with sincere intention.

“A clear distinguisher”: In other words, the book came to distinguish us from all other people. The book came to distinguish itself from all forms of falsehood. Sometimes falsehood has 90% truth and 10% falsehood, but *al-furqān* says that it has to be absolutely pure true or it is falsehood and there is no mixing allowed.

“And whoever witnesses this month should fast.” The introduction is incredible. Allāh didn’t begin by saying that this is the month you should be fasting. Allāh changed the subject entirely and said that this is the month in which the Qur’ān was sent down, which is guidance for humanity and the absolute distinguisher between truth and falsehood and guidance and misguidance.

The entire introduction is not about fasting but about the Qur’ān. Think about this. When we think about Ramaḍān, what do we think about first? We think about fasting and the food first. We think of the parties first. Allāh tells us that our minds should first go to the fact that we are celebrating the greatest document ever given to human possession. There is a tradition of the prophets, including our Prophet (*ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), where there were days and days of fasting. Fasting wasn’t even prescribed. Mūsa (*‘alayhi’l-salām*) had forty days of fasting.

What is the tradition of fasting, and how is it connected to revelation? When we fast, we all know that this is a denial of our human, worldly appetites. We are being denied those appetites for some time, and the purpose is to allow the other appetites to be fed. We are so concerned about the appetites of our body, stomach and lust, but there is another appetite we have of our souls. Look at the beauty of Ramaḍān. In the day you are starving your body, and in the night, you are feeding your soul. You are listening the Words of Allāh, which is food for the *rūḥ*. On the one hand you are weakening your physical self, and on the other hand, you are strengthening your spiritual self. You can carry this strength through the rest of the year.



Practical Tips

I want to spend a little bit of time about what we are supposed to do practically. There is a big difference between us and the companions from many perspectives. One of those perspectives is when they heard the Qur'ān being recited and when they recited more and more of it in the month of Ramaḍān and when they were listening to it being recited, there was no gap between them and what Allāh was saying. It was a direct communication from the Divine to them. They recited and understood immediately what it was saying to them and appreciated its beauty and power also. You and I try to do that when we go and stand in *tarawīḥ* prayer and the *masājīd* make the extra effort to get the *qāri* with a beautiful voice.

First of all, for those who are fortunate to go to *tarawīḥ* prayer and last, the fact that you even go is awesome. The tragedy of it is that the vast majority of us Muslims are standing there and enjoying the beauty of the recitation but are not enjoying what Allāh is saying at all because we don't know what He is saying and there is no direct connection. There is a big gap between what the *ṣaḥābah* experienced and what we are experiencing. When there is a difference in this experience, then what comes as a result is also different.

An analogy is that there is one plant you are feeding pure water and what it needs. There is another plant and you are feeding it some kind of liquid, but it is not getting it and there is a filter and layer that is not letting the water seep into the soil. We are not going to see the same results and are not going to see the output. We have to make an effort to compensate for that. It is not like you are going to learn Arabic in a month. It is not like you are going to learn the *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān in a couple of weeks and Ramaḍān is around the corner.

Connecting with the Qur'ān

What do you and I have to do to make the most of this month in terms of connecting with the Qur'ān practically and understanding what it has to do here? At the heart of it, it has to do with how Allāh makes us different from all other nations. How do we reconnect with the Qur'ān in this month in a way like never before? I'm personally a believer in practical stuff. I could give you stories of how the companions used to recite the Qur'ān and how the *salaf* (early generations of scholars) used to recite the entire night and over and over again.

The practical reality of it is that the fact that you made time to listen to this broadcast is an accomplishment for you. You have a busy day and a lot going on, especially in your virtual life, and for you to make time like that normally in a day is difficult and not something typical for you. How do you practically get the most out of Ramaḍān? Start with some tangible, attainable goals.

Recitation after *Fajr*

Start with 20 minutes of recitation after *fajr*, and I specifically say after *fajr* because that way you will guarantee that you wake up for *fajr*. Waking up for *fajr* is a very high accomplishment for some of you, but try and do it starting now so that you have some momentum going into Ramaḍān so that it is not a situation where you have been lazy for this entire time and then the first day of Ramaḍān you will be up for *fajr*. Even if you are, your lazy momentum is far more than your active momentum, so after a couple of days, you will be back asleep again with the



momentum going down. When you get up, stay up 20 minutes. Don't rush it and take your time with it. Whether you understand it or not, just recite.

Our teacher used to tell me when I was studying Arabic that I needed to recite at least 20 minutes a day, and I said, "What's the point? I don't know Arabic." He said, "Let me tell you a story." I will tell you the same story. A child asked his father the same question about why he should recite Qur'ān because he didn't understand Arabic. His father took him to the ocean and gave him a dirty bucket with a hole in the bottom and told him to fill it up. The child ran and filled up the bucket and ran back, but by the time he was back, it was empty. The father told him to go fill it up again. The child said that there was a hole, but the dad said to fill it up again. He did this five or six times. Then the child asked, "What is the point?" The father said, "Do you notice any difference in the bucket? Is it cleaner?" The child said, "Yes." The father said, "That is why you read Qur'ān even though you don't understand it." Even that has benefits.

Don't be philosophical and say that until you are the master of Arabic grammar and you have a Ph.D. in *balāghah* and have done some degrees in *tafsīr*, then what is the point of reading the Qur'ān in Arabic. Don't be like that. Just recite the Qur'ān for its own sake anyway.

On top of that, there is one of two things you can do. In our institute, we are trying to provide recordings of Qur'ān recitation for people who don't read much so at least they can put it on their phones and listen to it in their cars so that at least they are getting some Qur'ān information every day. If you don't want to do that, then buy yourself a good, basic *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān in English. At least you are reading or listening to something that explains the Qur'ān every day. My suggestion would be to try to study things that you have already memorized. You don't have to have a relationship with the entire Qur'ān in the month of Ramaḍān. That is not going to happen and not realistic. You can get significantly closer to the Qur'ān than you were before.

Building Our Relationship with the Qur'ān

I myself feel very far from Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta 'āla*) and feel guilty every day that I'm not closer. What I need to do for myself is what I'm telling you very honestly. We need to make a very clear assessment of what kind of time commitment we can give to Allāh's Book daily without exception. We all know our time schedules and what our weekdays and weekends are like and how much time we spend in commute and in chores. There are some things you do on time and don't think twice about it. One of those things religiously speaking, if you are anywhere near being a committed Muslim, is your daily prayers. One of the easiest ways you can connect to the Qur'ān is associating a 5-10 minute reading or studying of the Qur'ān every single prayer. You don't have to make extra time because you were going to use that time to pray anyway. This is a practical and helpful step in you progressing with the Qur'ān.

I'm going to switch gears and talk to you about something personal, which is my own personal relationship with the Qur'ān and how I approach the study of the Qur'ān for myself. Maybe you will find some parallels and maybe you won't, but I think it is of benefit to some of you at least.

First and foremost, I really do believe that the best way to learn the Qur'ān initially is not through reading. I'm talking about beyond the actual recitation of the Qur'ān, which should go on every day. After that, I think the best way to go about understanding the Qur'ān is to have a teacher



and have someone explain it to you. Many of you are not in that position and don't have a shaykh or imam or regular *tafsīr* session going on, or even if there is, maybe you don't understand the language being used. If that is the case, find a series online that you can listen to. What you listen to sticks in your head. What you read goes away quickly.

If you heard a powerful *khuṭbah* and were paying attention, you remember it. It's incredible. There is something about listening. Allāh highlights listening to the Qur'ān when He says, "We heard a unique Qur'ān." Allāh highlights this. It is listening to the recitation or the explanation because we have to fill that gap. The *ṣaḥābah* didn't have a special explanation session, and the Qur'ān was self-explanatory to them on many occasions. Having a teacher or having a listening experience is very important. It was for me and really broadened my horizons in the study of the Qur'ān. I was able to understand it much better that way because I'm a better listener than I am a reader. I can read something and understand it, but I won't retain it.

The second point is that there is an overflow of resources online now and so many translations and so much available to you that you become overwhelmed. You may ask, what translation should I read? You have a pile of books or online resources and don't touch any of them because it looks like an ocean and if you go any closer then you'll drown. Take one thing and take your time with it. Don't diversify so much. Allāh Himself said in the *sūrah*, and this concept of Allāh intending ease and not difficulty for you is not just about fasting. It is about what Allāh began with – the Qur'ān itself. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) is being told, "We didn't send the Qur'ān to you to put you in difficulty." This is the same Qur'ān that Allāh says if He sent it down on a mountain, it would collapse. On the one hand, a mountain can't handle it, and on the other hand, it is given to the Messenger (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) and he is being told it is not there to make life difficult for him. Here we are learning that Allāh wants to make ease and not difficulty. In *Sūrat'l-Nisā'*, we learn that Allāh just wants to lighten your burden and make things easy for you.

Allāh wants us to enjoy the ease of life through this Qur'ān. The practical part of it is to be realistic and don't get overwhelmed with too many resources and take one thing at a time and look at a set amount of time – 15-20 minutes or whatever you can give. Make that time a regular part of your life. You are going to be living your life the way you are ten years from now, too. Don't justify their laziness today with unrealistic needs. Don't be people whose false hopes delude them now. Be a people of today.

I tell my students all the time that there is no such thing as tomorrow. All you and I have is today. If there is a change that is going to come in your life, if it doesn't come today, then you might as well not even talk about it. Don't say that from Ramaḍān you will pray *fajr* in the *maṣjid*. You have to start from today. Your attitude has to be now, and you and I don't know if we have until Ramaḍān. We have to bring this attitude of immediate change into ourselves. The *ṣaḥābah* were in prayer and they turned.

Attitude

As I conclude, I want to go back to the first thing I started with – attitude. I told you that the revelation of Qur'ān distinguishes us from other nations. This is also a point of pride. Nowadays we complain about non-Muslims making fun of us. When the *qiblah* changed, the people made



fun of the Muslims. Allāh made what people were making fun of the point of our pride. It is something we are proud of. The month of Ramaḍān is a month of taking pride in the Qur’ān and saying that we are people of Qur’ān. Nowadays when people hear the word Qur’ān outside, what kinds of thoughts run in their minds? Crazy, fanatical, barbaric. We know the Prophet’s (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) promises. We are committing ourselves to Ramaḍān and connecting ourselves to the Qur’ān and we can earn forgiveness and start a new start.

The Qur’ān itself is a mercy. Allāh, the unimaginably Merciful, taught the Qur’ān. We have to realize that the Qur’ān is not a burden on us. It is a mercy from Allāh to us and we have to try to qualify ourselves for that mercy and earn that mercy from Allāh. For people who can make a journey to the Qur’ān and even do a little especially in this month, it can transform their lives. Don’t let this be like any other tradition for any other religion. Other religions have festivals and parties and have turned what is supposed to be originally something that was supposed to bring them closer to God into a party. Don’t let that happen. Allāh talks about the previous nations and how their attitude became corrupted and says that after a long time went by, their hearts became hard.

The month of revelation is what we have. Don’t let it become the month of biryani, baklava, and *iftār* parties. It’s supposed to be a month when we go back to our roots and connect back to this Book. We are supposed to be a distinguished nation and the Qur’ān is a point of pride.

The Qur’ān is a record of the struggles of the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam). The entire Book is a record of what he struggled through. He went through one challenge and Allāh revealed āyāt to help him through. After that there is no break, and the next challenge and the next revelation come. The Qur’ān is constantly his guide through all of the challenges and all of the storms. There will never be a job more difficult than that of the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam). When we say that we are going to connect ourselves to the Qur’ān, it is disingenuous to say that and not say that we are going to connect ourselves to the same struggle of the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam). We carry the same concerns for ourselves, our families, and those around us of saving ourselves.

The concern never left him and it was such an overwhelming concern that at times the Qur’ān told the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) to calm down and not stress out. “You are going to kill yourself in grief if you keep worrying about the consequences of what they are doing.” Allāh calms His Messenger down. Where is that concern in the *ummah*? This religion is more than about ourselves. It is about all of humanity and the larger picture and guidance for all. This message was delivered from a human being to a human being. The Messenger himself delivered it to others, which requires struggle. How are we delivering the Qur’ān? When we deliver the Qur’ān, it means that we represent its message. How are we representing it in our character? These are things for us to think about.

Connecting to the Qur’ān doesn’t just mean to recite it more, which is critical, and doesn’t mean to memorize it more and listen to it in *tarawīḥ*. All of these things are helping us become one with the Qur’ān not only in the time we spend with it but how it affects our personality. The character of the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) was the Qur’ān. The āyāt start becoming the way we look at the world. It is not a book of academics and not a book of recitation or beauty. All of these



things are there, but more than anything else, it is a book of attitude. Once you internalize the Qur'ān, your attitude about everything is different. Everything you see around you gives you a reminder of Allāh. You see Allāh's āyāt everywhere after you have a connection with the Qur'ān. When you don't, then it is just a book to be recited. You can have that attitude, but you will miss out on the spirit of it and what this month is really supposed to be.

I pray that all of us become a people of Qur'ān in this month and we take the advice of Allāh's Messenger (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) who told us, "People of Qur'ān, don't be lazy with the Qur'ān. Read it and follow it like it deserves all hours of the night and day. Spread it. Beautify it with your voices and reflect so that you may be able to be successful." I pray that Allāh makes us from the successful and from the people of the Qur'ān. What an honor it would be for the Messenger to call us people of the Qur'ān. Let's earn that name and let's be able to say on the Day of Judgment that we are people of the Qur'ān.

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