



TIME WITH THE GLORIOUS QUR'AN-PART TWO (2)

QUR'AN 2: 183-186

**TOPIC: Leadership Lessons -
Overview of the Lord's Approach in
Issuing Instructions**



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*In the Name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful!
May Allah's Salutations and Peace Be upon the Noble Prophet and His
Household.*

Before our commentary discussion, I would, like always, quote an extract from Khutbat as-Sha'abaniya (Sha'abaniya sermon). I pray Allah to help us derive the maximum benefit therein.

The Holy Prophet (S.A.W) says:

In this month you are the guests of Allah, enjoying His hospitality. You are from among His favourites. Your breath is "praise of Allah" and your sleep is worship. Your deeds are accepted and your supplications are answered. So, invoke Allah, your Lord, with honest intentions and pure hearts to grant you success in fasting and reciting His Book in this month.

Today, we intend to discuss Fasting, its philosophy vis-à-vis Allah's approach in issuing the ordinance with concentration on (Al-Baqara 183 to 185).

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (183) أَيَّامًا مَعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامٍ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (184) شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَنْ كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَى مَا هَدَاكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (185)

O! you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you; that you may become righteous (183).

[Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew. (184).

The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion; so whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful. (185)

As the Prophet ﷺ says in the Sha'abaniya sermon, Allah has invited us to a very lavish feast. A feast where everything is provided, and the benevolence and munificence of Allah are on full display. Everything we need to grow spiritually is well provided. For the operationalization of these spiritual gifts, Allah has issued an order to his servants to observe a month-long fast during Ramadan.

Allah is well aware that this order although good may be difficult for his servants. This is an order that prohibits people from indulging their carnal desires of food, drink and sex from dawn to dusk for a whole month. As physical as human beings

are, this will certainly prove a very arduous task for many. As omniscient as Allah is, He knows this very well. Human beings however are not only carnal but spiritual. Allah thus wants to improve the spiritual lives of his servants. Allah wants to guide them so that they may attain salvation from eternal damnation in the hereafter.

Allah is almighty, omnipotent and has absolute dominion over all things. In contrast, human beings are poor and powerless. Everything we have is from Him. We cannot have or do anything against His will. Against His majesty and magnificence, we have no will and can make a determination of nothing. He, Almighty, can therefore easily issue commands without any explanation just like some commanders, teachers, chiefs and other persons vested with power are wont to do.

But Allah, in spite of his superiority over all of us, has adopted an approach that is essentially different from the approach used by some leaders, teachers, chiefs, etc. Allah's approach is different because apart from Allah being the creator of man and the controller of his affairs, he is also man's teacher and guide. Allah's approach shows His kindness, mercy and love for mankind. Allah's approach is in essence one of friendship.

Today, we would like to take a closer look at Allah's approach and hopefully learn from Him. It is useful for all of us especially those vested with some power and authority, who don't wish to be just commanders, but rather like to act as teachers and guides.

Whenever Allah wishes to issue any command, he does so in a very special and sublime manner. He gives a very detailed description of his command. This is so that human beings will understand how merciful and kind Allah is. Again it also to provide us with some training tips.

Address Followers with Beautiful Words

Allah starts His order thus: "O you who have believed".

As Imam Sadeq (A.S) explains, the expression "O you who have believed" which Allah chose to address his servants with, in spite how weak their faith is and how deficient their deeds are, is very inviting, assuring and sweet to the ears. It provides solace and eliminates the difficulty associated with worship. This is how Allah

who has the power to execute His will and ensure compliance with His orders chooses to address his servants: with tender, love and care. This teaches us that the first step for anyone who has authority to issue orders and has reason to think that the order may be difficult for his subordinates, is to respect them by addressing them beautifully and with love.

Simplify Task

Allah knows the assignment may be difficult for some. After a beautiful address, Allah starts to ease the burden on us by assuring us that the task is not as laborious as we may think it is, and that it had been done by others before. Allah says thus: “Fasting is decreed upon you as it was decreed for those before you”. Obviously this teaches us that the Muslim Ummah are not the first to undertake this kind of spiritual exercise. Rather, fasting was observed by many nations before us. The fact that we are not the first to traverse this path gives us some kind of relief.

To further reduce the difficulty of fasting Allah followed it with this: “(Fast is only for) a certain number of days.” This alleviates the anxiety of thinking that fasting is to be observed over a long period.

From this, one technique that a superior may apply when he wants to assign a difficult task is to simplify the task such that it becomes easy for their subordinates.

Explain the Philosophy Behind the Task.

Leaders and all people in positions of authority are under no obligation whatsoever to explain the philosophy behind their orders. People however will easily obey an instruction if they know and understand the rationale or philosophy behind it. Any leader who is compassionate and wants to be effective will therefore explain the rationale behind his decisions and orders in order to make it easier for his subordinates to easily obey and better execute it. This is especially so if the leader wants to be a teacher and not a boss to his subordinates. This is Allah’s approach. Out of His infinite mercy, Allah explains the rationale for fasting thus, “That you may ward off (evil)”. This explains the fact of fasting being a great and effective tool for training the spirit and for attaining piety.

Almighty Allah again explains the philosophy of fasting thus: “That you may glorify Allah for having guided you, and that you may be thankful”. This tells us that the main rationale for fasting is our own guidance.

Allah further emphasises that we as humans stand solely to benefit from the fast of Ramadan. Allah says: "...And that you fast is better for you if you did (only) know..." This means that the benefit of fasting is for the worshipper. Thankfully, medicine has proved that there are many benefits of fasting. According to medical research, some of the benefits of fasting include inter alia:

1. Reduction of Insulin resistance, thereby lowering risk of type 2 diabetes,
2. Reduction of oxidative stress and inflammation in the body,
3. Improving health of the heart,
4. Reduction of risk of cancer, and
5. Extension of lifespan, thereby helping one to live longer

Consider Ability of Follower to Carry Out Task.

One of the things that every leader must consider when issuing instructions is the subordinate's ability to carry them out. Allah after instructing his servants to observe Ramadan fast, immediately delineated those who are obliged to carry it out. Allah therefore exempts the sick, the traveller and all who for valid reasons are not able to fast from observing the Ramadan fast. Allah says:

لا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

Allah does not task any soul beyond its capacity.

Allah always considers his servants' capacity to carry out his instructions before issuing them, and so should every sane leader.

Fashion Out Alternative Task for Those Unable to Carry Out Task

Another thing a leader (trainer) must take into consideration is the situation where some people are unable for whatever reason to follow his first or original instructions or orders. Should they be left to their fate? They should rather be considered and an alternative task be fashioned out for them, which they are capable of carrying out without much qualms. This way they will be able to carry out their assigned tasks and benefit from whatever benefit there may be. In this regard, Allah says: "...But whoever among you is sick or on a journey, then (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days; and for those who are hardly able to, (there is) a redemption by feeding an indigent..."

"Command Arrangement" Must be Instructive

The Commands issued by a leader (trainer), should be informative and insightful. Here it is said, those who cannot at all fast, even in other days, must feed an indigent. While fasting is for Allah, but "secondary task" which is it is feeding an indigent is a form of social service. By this way the trainee can understand easily the importance of this kind of social service. Especially when trainee sees whenever Allah rich to social services Says:

فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ

It is better for him who volunteers more

Choose Best Time for Effective Implementation

Another thing a leader must be mindful of is the choice of time for the execution of his orders. In this regard, we know that Allah ordered fasting for man's guidance. When then is the best time for man to fast in order to attain guidance?

According to the Quran when Allah bestows a favour upon us and blesses us, we should mark the date and time and commemorate it by celebrating it. When we celebrate a blessing, we remind ourselves of the favours that Allah has bestowed upon us and show gratitude to Him. This way, Allah grants us more mercy and more blessing. (Quran 5:114 & 14:5).

We know the Quran to be the primary book of guidance which was revealed in the month of Ramadan. Allah says: "The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the distinction". Is it mere coincidence that Allah instructs us to seek guidance by observing fast in no other month than that in which the Book of Guidance was revealed? Obviously, this cannot be mere coincidence. Allah intends that by fasting in the month of Ramadan, mankind will get more familiar with the Quran through recitation and reflection on its verses. This way, man finds guidance easier.

The choice of time for the execution of a task, order or command is therefore very important. An order or plan may be very good, but problems may arise if the timing of implementation is wrong. A plan or order is as good as the time of implementation or execution.

Choose Easiest Means of Attaining Goal

Another thing is the means of attaining the goal. The leader must choose the easiest means of attaining the goal, so as not to unduly burden his subjects. Almighty Allah always takes the easy way.

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ

Allah desires ease for you, He does not desire for you difficulty.

Because Allah desires salvation and guidance for mankind, he decreed Ramadan (the month in which Quran, the Book of Guidance, was revealed) to be the month of fasting. Leaders (trainers) should in the same vein seek the easiest means for their followers to reach their goals

In conclusion, we can deduce from our discussion that Allah in spite of His majesty, might and superiority over all of mankind, has, in making ordinance for mankind adopted an approach that shows mercy and kindness towards mankind. His approach is one that helps humanity to attain perfection, if only they will learn from it and do as He commands them. His approach is one that gives mankind a better life because of all the considerations that went into it. Allah's approach takes into account such considerations as the best means of courting the attention of the subject, ability to carry out the order, best time for implementation, easiest means of attaining the goal, etc. In our Lord's approach are lessons for all who are in positions of authority.

اللَّهُمَّ نَوِّرْ قُلُوبَنَا بِالْقُرْآنِ، وَزَيِّنْ أَخْلَاقَنَا بِالْقُرْآنِ، وَأَصْلِحْ أُمُورَنَا بِالْقُرْآنِ، وَأَشْفِ مَرَضَانَا
بِالْقُرْآنِ، اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلِ الْقُرْآنَ لَنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا قَرِينًا وَفِي الْقَبْرِ مُوَسِّيًا وَأَنْبِيَاءَ

وصل اللهم على محمد وآله الأطهار