

Tafseer on Ethics - Summary
Sessions 09 and 10
Friday, 25 Nov and 02 Dec 2005

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*We seek forgiveness from Allah.
We stand witness to Allah that there is no God but Him.
That Mohammad (SAWW) is his slave and messenger.*

Introduction

Why do we celebrate 'Eid?

- 'Eid is celebrated after completion of the number of days of fasting at the end of the month of Ramadhan. Indeed, Allah SWT says in Surah *Al Baqarah* 2:185:

وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَى مَا
هَدَاكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

“And (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for His having guided you and that you may give thanks”.

- A lot of people think that we celebrate 'Eid to mark the end of Ramadhan. This is not true. Indeed, we should be sad that Ramadhan has come to an end.
- Imam Zain-ul Abidin in Shahiffat Sajjadiyah (Dua No. 45) pleads before Allah while bidding farewell to Ramadhan. The way that this dua is written, it leaves the impression that the Imam is crying over someone's funeral. In fact he is crying that the Holy Month has finally gone away from our hands.
- So why do we celebrate 'Eid? In Arabic, 'Eid is derived from the word Oudh, which means “return”. Thus 'Eidul Fitri means return to fitrah, return to our very nature, our own self. The word return indicates that we had gone somewhere during Ramadhan and that we have now returned to our original state.
- Some traditions say that we were Allah's guests for a month. Thus on the day of 'Eid we return from being his guest for a month. When we visit someone we return after having food. But with Allah as a host, eating and drinking is prohibited. One explanation is that in the process of purifying ourselves we have to stop eating and drinking and practice restraint for the sake of Allah SWT. The analogy is similar to a patient who visits a doctor on an empty stomach since the doctor has advised him not to eat as otherwise pathological tests that he wants to carry out will become void.
- In fact after the month of Ramadhan we “return” after having been fed food for our souls. This spiritual food emanates from the Holy Quran and is part of the cleansing process of our souls. This is the reason why we celebrate 'Eid.

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- This spiritual cleansing is for those who have learnt something from the month of Ramadhan and have come closer to Allah SWT. Thus, 'Eid is not for those who have merely kept themselves hungry without committing any good deeds.
- The logic of the above argument implies that any day when our souls are purified is a day of 'Eid for us. In fact, Imam Ali in a hadith has stated that the day a man does not commit a sin, is a day of 'Eid for him. [*Mizaanul Hikmah. Hadith # 14304*]
- In Surah *Al Qasas 28:85* Allah SWT says:

إِنَّ الَّذِي فَرَضَ عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لَرَادُّكَ إِلَىٰ
مَعَادٍ قُلْ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ مَنْجَاءً بِالْهُدَىٰ وَمَنْ هُوَ
فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

“Most surely He Who has made the Quran binding on you will bring you back to the destination. Say: My Lord knows best him who has brought the guidance and him who is in manifest error”.

- The Arabic word ma'ad in the above verse, has been translated as a 'place of return' by Yusuf Ali. Pickthal has translated it as 'home', while Shakir has translated it as 'back to your destination'. Thus in the spirit of celebrating 'Eid, we should always remember that Allah will 'return' us to our home or destination.

Merits of the soul: Syukur (Gratitude)

Introduction to the meaning of Syukur

- Thankfulness means appreciation of the *ni'mah* (favour, blessing, bounty) provided by the Provider and the appearance of the effects of this appreciation in the heart, on the tongue, and in bodily acts and movements.
- As to heart, the effects there are of such nature as humility, awe, love and the like. As to the tongue, the effects there appear as praise and glorification. As to the bodily members, the effects consist of obedience, and the use of the bodily members for the good pleasure of Allah.
- In Surah *Ali 'Imran 3:144* Allah SWT says that:

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ
أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ

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**عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ
الشَّاكِرِينَ**

“And Muhammad is no more than an apostle; the apostles have already passed away before him; if then he dies or is killed will you turn back upon your heels? And whoever turns back upon his heels, he will by no means do harm to Allah in the least and Allah will reward the grateful”.

- Allah SWT will reward those syakiriin, those who feel grateful (syukur) and the best practical form of gratitude is by preserving one’s faith.
- In the Holy Qur’an Allah has said in Surah Lukman that if we are thankful to Allah it actually means we are doing a favor to our own selves. This is because Allah is self-sufficient and whatever that we do it will not harm nor favor Allah. One of Allah’s attribute is “syakiir wa masykuur”. In Jausan Kabiir we recite “Yaa khoiran syaakiriin wa masykuur” meaning the “One who best appreciates and be appreciated”.
- The word *Alhamdulillah* means “all praise belongs to Allah”. We should try to use this word as often as possible in our daily lives since we can never repay the bounties of the Almighty.

Man’s ungrateful nature

- Allah SWT at various places in the Quran has said that mankind is unjust and unthankful. For instance, in *Surah Ibrahim 14:7* Allah SWT says:

وَإِذْ تَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رِيبٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

“And when your Lord made it known: If you are grateful, I would certainly give to you more, and if you are ungrateful, My chastisement is truly severe”.

- In the above verse, the Arabic word *kufir* means ‘ingratitude’. Thus infidelity emanates from ingratitude.
- Further, in Surah An-Nahl 16:53-54, Allah SWT states:

**وَمَا يَكُم مِّنْ نُّعْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ تُمْ إِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فَإِلَيْهِ تَجْأُرُونَ
تُمْ إِذَا كُشِفَ الضُّرُّ عَنْكُمْ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِّنْكُمْ يَرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ**

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“Whosoever blessing you have, it comes from God. Then when affliction visits you it is unto Him that you groan. Then, when He removes the affliction from you, lo, a party of you assign associates to their Lord”

- In Surah Al-Israa 17:67, Allah SWT has further stated:

**وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِلَٰهَهُ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ
أَعْرَضْتُمْ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا**

“And when affliction visits you upon the sea, then there go astray those on whom you call except Him. And when He delivers you to land, you turn away. Man is ever unthankful”

- In the above verses, Allah has condemned the ungrateful nature of man. Man asks his Lord for help when he is in trouble but when all is well, he forgets the favours bestowed to him by the Almighty. Surely, for such ungrateful people awaits a painful chastisement.
- Moreover, in Surah An-Nahl Allah 16:112, Allah SWT has stated:

**وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِّن
كُلِّ مَكَانٍ فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا
كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ**

“God has struck a similitude: a city that was secure, at rest, its provision coming to it easefully from every place, then it was unthankful for the blessings of God; so God let it taste the garment of hunger and of fear, for the things that they were working”

- In the above verse the importance of gratitude has been emphasized. It is clear from the above verse that if the blessings of Allah are not appreciated then they turn into misfortunes. It is thus incumbent on us to thank Allah in every state.
- It is said that once an atheist went to Imam Sadiq and asked him to provide a proof for the existence of God. The Imam asked him if he had ever embarked on a ship which later got wrecked in the middle of the sea. The atheist replied that he in fact once went through that dreadful experience. The Imam then said, “During that time of affliction, did you ask any Power for help?” The atheist replied, “Yes, I did.” The Imam replied, “Verily that invisible Power is the Lord Almighty.” [*The light of The Holy Qur’an Vol 8 page 719*]

Worship: A form of thanking Allah

- One night that the Messenger of Allah (S) - may God's peace and benedictions be upon him and his progeny - was with 'A'ishah, she said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah, why do you exhaust yourself when God has forgiven you your former and latter sins?' The Prophet (S)

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replied: 'O 'A'ishah, shouldn't I be a grateful servant?' " The Imam (A) added: "The Messenger of Allah - may God's peace and benedictions be upon him and his progeny-used to stand on the toes of his feet (in prayer in the night) and so God, the Glorious and the Exalted, sent down the verse: '*Taba. We have not sent down the Qur'an upon thee to cause thee hardship.*' "(20:1). [Al-Kafi, ii, "*kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr*" "*bab al-shukr*," *hadith no.2*]

- From the above hadith, it is clear that Aisyah had imagined that the motive behind worship was confined to the fear of punishment or the effacement of sins. She had imagined that the worship of the Noble Prophet (God bless him and his progeny) was like the worship of other people. Therefore she wondered as to why the Prophet took so much pain. This thought was as much due to her ignorance of the station of worship and servanthood as due to her ignorance of the station of Prophethood and messenger hood.
- Amir-ul-mu'mineen, the master of the virtuous, Ali Ibn Abi Talib(a.s.), regarding Allah, says: "I worship You neither for the fear of the fire (of Your hell) nor for the desire of Your paradise, but I found You fit for worshipping and I worshipped You." [Bihar-ul-anwar, vol. 72, p. 186]
- Those who have realized the utter dependence of human being on the Almighty Allah would never worship Allah for the sake of Paradise. They would worship Him because He deserves to be worshipped. Imam Ali has said:

Surely some people worshipped Allah in anticipation [of reward]; this is the worship of traders; and some people worshipped Allah out of fear [of Hell]; this is the worship of bondsman; and another group of people worshipped Allah out of thankfulness, this is the worship of the liberated and free ones (ahrar).
[Nahj al-Balagh, wisdom no. 237]

The two components of faith: Patience and Gratitude

- It is said in a riwayat that: "Faith is of two halves. The first half is shabar (patience), and the second half is syukur (thankfulness)". That is because the wayfarer is never without a state which is either agreeable or disagreeable. He should be thankful for that which is agreeable and patient in bearing that which is disagreeable. [Ali al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-'ummal, vol. 1, p. 36]
- In a hadith it is narrated that Imam Ja'far Shadiq mentioned that it is possible for a person to enter paradise just by a sipping some water. His companions then asked him how that was possible. The Imam replied, "Before such a person takes the sip, he begins with the name of Allah. After taking the sip of water, he thanks Allah. And he continues to thank Allah until he finishes his last sip of water. Such a person will enter jannah because of the gratitude that he has shown to Allah for His bounties." [Mishkat Ul- Anwar bab al- shukur]

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Thanking Allah the way He deserves

- It should be noted that thanking Allah the way He deserves is beyond the limitation of the human being because of two reasons. Firstly, because every ‘thanks’ necessitates another thanks, since thanking Him is a blessing in itself. And secondly, we cannot enumerate and count the blessings of Almighty Allah.
- Imam Zain ul-Abidin in his prayer *Munuajat al-Shakirin* mentions these two reasons as follows:

Thy boons are abundant - my tongue is too weak to count them!
Thy favours are many – my understanding falls short of grasping them,
not to speak of exhausting them!
So how can I achieve thanksgiving?
For my thanking Thee requires thanksgiving.
Whenever I say, ‘To Thee belongs praise!’,
it becomes thereby incumbent upon me to say,
‘To Thee belongs praise!’

*[al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah (The Psalms of Islam, English translation by William Chittick),
Supplication no. 37, p. 243-244.]*

- Imam Sadiq narrated: Allah, the Exalted, revealed unto Musa: ‘O Musa, thank Me the way I deserve to be thanked.’ Musa said: ‘O Lord, how can I thank you the way You deserve to be thanked, while there is no gratitude that I express save that it in itself is a blessing that You have bestowed upon me.’ Allah said: ‘O Musa, it is now that you have thanked me the way I deserve to be thanked, knowing that that was from me.’ [*Allamah Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, v.13, p. 351.*]
- This is why it recommended that whenever we say Alhamdulillah we say it twice. The first Alhamdulillah is for the blessing and the second one is for the *taufiq* that Allah enabled us to thank Him.

The different elements of Gratitude

- The virtue of gratitude consists of the following elements:
 - The first element is the recognition of blessings and their origin, which is divine beneficence.
 - The second element involves delight on the account of blessings rather than on their worldly values per se.
 - The third element constitutes thanking Allah both in word and in deed and praising Him for His blessings.
 - The final element involves using the bounty or *ni'mah* in such a manner that would please the Giver.

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Imam Ali (as) on thankfulness

- In the first sermon of Nahjul Balaghah, Imam Ali has said that “Praise is due to Allah whose worth cannot be described by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by calculators and whose claim (to obedience) cannot be satisfied by those who attempt to do so, whom the height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate, and the divings of understanding cannot reach; He for whose description no limit has been laid down, no eulogy exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed. He brought forth creation through His Omnipotence, dispersed winds through His Compassion, and made firm the shaking earth with rocks”.

- Imam Ali in sermon no. 52 of Nahj al-Balagah says:

“By Allah if your hearts melt down thoroughly and your eyes shed tears of blood either in hope for Him or for hear from Him and you are also allowed to live in this world all the time that it lasts even then your actions cannot pay for His great bounties over you and His having guided you towards faith”.

The importance of Sajdah Shukr (Thanksgiving prostration)

- It is strongly recommended to go into *sujood* (prostration) after prayers to thank Him for *hidayat* or guidance.
- It is reported that once during a journey the Prophet dismounted his camel five times to perform *sajdah*. When the Prophet was about to mount back on the camel, after prostrating five times, his companions said to him that they had not seen him performing such an act before and asked him the reason for performing *sajdah* again and again. The Prophet replied, “Verily, Gabriel descended and bought five glad tidings and I performed *sajdah* for each of the five good news that he bought.” [Mizanul hikmah Hadith # 9622]
- In Surah Baqrah 2:119, Allah SWT says:

**إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ
الْجَحِيمِ**

*“We have sent thee with the truth, good tidings to bear, and warning
Thou shalt not be questioned touching the inhabitants of Hell”*

- In the above verse, the Arabic word *Bashr* means ‘good news’. From the above hadith it is clear that it is sunnah to perform the *sajdah* upon hearing good tidings.
- During a *sajdah* in *namaz* we have to ensure that seven body parts are touching the ground (toes, knees, palms and foreheads). It is *mustahab* to touch the nose on the ground as well.

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However, for *sajdah shukr*, there is the additional requirement for men that the elbows be touching the ground as well.

- According to Imam Sadiq, the *sajdah shukr* or thanksgiving prostration is incumbent upon every Muslim. He has further said that when a servant of Allah performs the thanksgiving prostration, even the malaika or angels are proud of him. It is said that when a servant of Allah is performing the *sajdah shukr*, Allah tells the angels to look at his servant who is fulfilling his obligations and thanking Me for My blessings. Allah then asks the angels what He has in store for him. The malaika reply that His blessings are in store for His servant. Allah then asks them 'What else is in store for him?' The angels say your Paradise is in store for him. Allah asks 'What else?' The angels then say that they cannot think of any other goodness apart from the ones that they mentioned. Allah then says that there is another goodness that they have overlooked. The angels then answer that they do not have knowledge of this other goodness. Allah then replies, 'I will thank him as he has thanked Me and will guarantee him my favour.' [*Thawaabul a'amaal wa 'iqaabuha* pg 295)

Mind Blowing Story

Bahloul goes to the public hot bath

One day Bohloul went to the public bathhouse, but its servants acted carelessly and didn't massage him with the sponge. In that regard, when coming out, Bohloul gave the bath's owner all 10 dinars he had. When the servants saw his generosity, they got embarrassed as to why they showed him such carelessness.

The next week Bohloul again went to the hot bath. This time all the servants gave him a bath with extreme respect and honor, and showed open-heartedness, but besides all this hard work and effort, Bohloul gave only one dinar when he came out.

The bath's workers angrily asked, "Last week your unnecessary tip and what is the reason for today's behavior?"

Bohloul replied, "I paid for today's bath last week when I came and gave; I am paying for that bath today so that you people will behave respectfully with your customers."

Disclaimer:

In this tafseer class, there might be shortcomings in imparting the knowledge of the tafseer. If there is any information that requires correction, please do not hesitate to let us know via e-mail :

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