

Home > Manifestations of the All-Merciful > O Allāh, Satisfy Every Hungry Person > Hunger from A Mystical Dimension:

## O Allāh, Satisfy Every Hungry Person

اللَّهُمَّ أَشْبِعْ كُلَّ جَائِعٍ

### Experiencing Hunger

One of the philosophies behind fasting in the holy month of Ramadan is to experience hunger and thereby understand the situation of those who are hungry and cannot afford to feed themselves properly. The following tradition quoted by Mawlā Fayd Kashānī from *Man Lā Yahduruhu'l Faqīh*, speaks of the same: in an authentic narration, Imām al-Sādiq (as), whilst explaining the philosophy of fasting, says:

أَرَادَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَنْ يُسَوِّيَ بَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ، وَأَنْ يُذِيقَ الْغَنِيَّ نَيْلَ الْجُوعِ وَالْأَلْمَ، لِيَرِقَّ عَلَى الضَّعِيفِ وَيَرْحَمَ الْجَائِعَ.

“Allāh, the Exalted and Glorious, desired to maintain equality between His creatures and make the rich person experience hunger and pain so that he may have pity on the weak and mercy on the hungry one.”<sup>1</sup>

### Causes of Hunger

Hunger is a widespread problem in today's world and has several causes, which may be classified into two kinds: self-related and external. The source of the self-related causes is the sufferer himself, whereas external causes stem from the society and other natural phenomena. To discuss both these kinds of causes is beyond the scope of this limited commentary.

It is important however to study the limitations of these causes so that we may be able to attempt to

avoid or eradicate them altogether. The verse under discussion, as can be observed clearly, is also closely related to poverty.

We had earlier mentioned the fact that every dependent thing stands by Allāh's permission. Hence, if Allāh (swt) does not want one to encounter disasters or be affected by them nothing would happen to him. This universal law, as pointed out earlier, is not only presented by revelation, but also established by reason.

## Ensuring Sustenance

Having realized this important truth, let us now look at the following verses of the Holy Qur'an:

1. Chapter al-'Arf – 7:96:

﴿ وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ... ﴾

***“And if the people of the towns were to believe and observe piety, surely we would have opened to them the blessings of the heaven and the earth...”***

2. Chapter al-Talq – 65:2-3:

﴿ وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا. وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ ﴾

***“And whosoever is God-wary (observes piety) He would make for him a way out [from difficulties] and Bestow on him sustenance from whence he expects not...”***

3. Chapter Nāh – 71:10-12:

﴿ فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا. يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا. وَيُمْدِدْكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَيَبْنِيَنَّ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارًا ﴾

***“Then I said: seek forgiveness from your Lord, [for] indeed He is the Most-forgiving; He would send down abundance of rain upon you; and aid you with wealth and sons; and make for you gardens and make for you rivers.”***

These verses inform the human being about the best path of ensuring sustenance and avoiding the

calamity of hunger. If the culture of taqwā and istighfār (in its various manifestations and dimensions) were to prevail, hunger would no more be a predicament save in cases of Divine trial.

﴿ وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ... ﴾

**“And We would certainly try You with somewhat of fear and hunger...”<sup>2</sup>**

We also have many traditions that guide the hungry and the destitute, as well those who would like to disseminate the culture of independence, about the ways of achieving sustenance. Following are some examples:

## Increasing Sustenance

1. Imām al-Sādiq (as) is reported to have said<sup>3</sup>:

إِنَّ الْبِرَّ يَزِيدُ فِي الرِّزْقِ.

“Indeed, virtuousness increases sustenance.”

2. Imām al-Sādiq (as) is reported to have said<sup>4</sup>:

حُسْنُ الْخُلُقِ يَزِيدُ فِي الرِّزْقِ.

“Good behaviour (*akhlaq*) increases sustenance.”

3. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said<sup>5</sup>:

دُمْ عَلَى الطَّهَارَةِ، يُوسَعُ عَلَيْكَ فِي الرِّزْقِ.

“Always be in the state of *tahāra* (purity) and your sustenance shall be increased.”

Therefore, the duty of those who sincerely utter this verse of the supplication, besides actively supporting others, should be to educate them to realize the direct causes of hunger.

The esteemed author of *Mir'atun 'l Kamal*, the late [ʿAyatullāh al-Shaykh Māqānī](#) has filled six pages full of reasons that cause poverty and hamper one's sustenance. References have also come in the gloss of a later edition of this three-volume opus of devotions. Those interested can look at pages 569–583. Here, however, we would like to suffice ourselves with mentioning only a few of them:

## Causes that Hamper Sustenance

Expression of greed, sleeping between maghrib and 'ishā prayers', sleeping between fajr and sunrise, severing relationship with near relatives, sleeping naked for long durations, cursing one's children, eating in the state of lying down, abandoning prayers for one's parents, backbiting, *isrāf* (over eating, extravagance, etc.), seeking the faults of people, eating while walking, urination and sexual intercourse while facing qibla, urinating on water, laughing excessively especially near graves and gatherings of the learned, not lending money to one who is need, expression of poverty to one who possesses wealth, and excessive sleep.

[ʿAyatullāh Māqānī](#) mentions about 175 causes in his manual.

Therefore, it is essential for us to propagate the culture of taqwā in those poor societies, which can absorb the teachings of Allāh (swt). Taqwā in every dimension of life enables one to experience happiness in this world as well as the Hereafter.

## A Deeper Consideration: Another Extension of Food

Food in Qur'ānic terminology does not always refer to material food. Rather, there are clear references made by the Imāms of the Ahlu'l Bayt (as) who are the most authoritative commentators of the Qur'ān, that *taʿām* (food) in the language of the Qur'ān, sometimes refers to knowledge. It refers to the food of the soul, and not only that of the body. The following verse is an example:

In chapter 'Abasa [80:24], Almighty Allāh says:

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ ﴿٢٤﴾

***“Then let man look at his food.”***

About this holy verse, the Shīʿite commentator Sayyid Hāshim Bahrī in his *Tafsīr al-Burhān* quotes a tradition narrated in *al-Kāfi* [v. 1, p.39, tr.8] from Imām al-Sādiq (as) as follows:

Zayd al-Shahhām asks Imām (as) what “man's food”<sup>6</sup> stands for in the verse above. The Imām (as) responds saying:

عِلْمُهُ الَّذِي يَأْخُذُهُ عَمَّنْ يَأْخُذُهُ...

“The knowledge that he acquires; from whom does he acquire it?”<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, if hunger means lack of knowledge many of us are indeed hungry. A scholar who has spent years in acquiring knowledge would also pray to Allāh to bestow on him more and more, for there is no limit to the acquisition of knowledge. The Holy Prophet (s) himself used to seek more knowledge by the following supplication that Almighty Allāh taught him in the Holy Qur’ān [20:114]:

﴿ وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا ﴾

**“And say: O my Lord increase me in knowledge.”**

And saying:

مَا عَرَفْنَاكَ حَقَّ مَعْرِفَتِكَ.

“We have not known your reality completely.”

The solution to this hunger too is *taqwā*. The following two verses clearly prove this contention:

1. Chapter al-Baqar: 2:282:

﴿ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمَكُمُ اللَّهُ ﴾

**“And adopt *taqwā*, and Allāh will teach you.”**

2. Chapter al-Anfāl: 8:29:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا ﴾

**“O believers, if you be God-wary (observe piety) Allāh shall enable you to distinguish the truth from the falsehood.”**

## Hunger from A Mystical Dimension:

The late mystic–scholar as well as teacher of [ʿIyātullāh Khumaynī](#), [ʿIyātullāh Malikī Tabrīzī](#) in his well–known manual of devotions “*al-Murqibāt*” explains the ample benefits of hunger for the spiritual traveler by mentioning some of the following traditions:

1. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

أَفْضَلُكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مَنْزِلَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ، أَطْوَلُكُمْ جُوعًا وَتَفَكُّرًا فِي اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ.

“The best of you in terms of rank near Allāh on the day of Judgment is the one among you who experiences hunger and engages in contemplation about Allāh, the exalted, for the longest period.”<sup>8</sup>

2. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have told Usāma:

إِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ يَأْتِيكَ مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ وَبَطْنُكَ جَائِعٌ، وَكَبِدُكَ ظَمَانٌ فَافْعَلْ، فَإِنَّكَ تُدْرِكُ بِذَلِكَ أَشْرَفَ الْمَنَازِلِ، وَتَحُلُّ مَعَ النَّبِيِّينَ، وَتَفْرَحُ بِقُدُومِ رُوحِكَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ، وَ يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكَ الْجَبَّارُ.

“If it is possible for you to encounter the angel of death while you are hungry and thirsty, then do so, for by that you would experience the noblest of stations and reside in the company of the Prophets, and the angels would rejoice in the arrival of your spirit, and God would send His Blessings on you.”<sup>9</sup>

3. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

أَجِيعُوا أَكْبَادَكُمْ وَأَعْرُوا أَجْسَادَكُمْ، لَعَلَّ قُلُوبَكُمْ تَرَى اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

“Keep your stomachs hungry and afflict your bodies; perhaps [by doing so] your hearts would see Allāh, the Exalted and Glorious.”<sup>10</sup>

4. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

مَنْ أَجَاعَ بَطْنَهُ عَظُمَتْ فِكْرَتُهُ.

“Whosoever keeps his stomach hungry would attain sublimity of thought.”<sup>11</sup>

5. The Holy Prophet (s) during his *mi‘raj* (his ascent to the proximity of God) asks Almighty Allāh:

يَا رَبِّ: مَا مِيرَاثُ الْجُوعِ؟

“O Lord what does hunger inherit?”

Almighty Allāh says:

الْحِكْمَةُ وَحِفْظُ الْقَلْبِ...

“It inherits wisdom and the protection of the heart...”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, “hunger” has a fundamental role to play in elevating the human being spiritually. However that should not be taken to mean that ‘hunger’ is recommended for all and sundry, including those who cannot withstand it and may fall sick or die. If we look at the book of Islamic laws<sup>13</sup> at our disposal, we would find that one of the etiquettes of consuming food is to take two meals a day: one meal in the earlier part of the day and the other in the earlier part of the night. The gap between these two meals should not be filled with any other kind of food. Many of us do have the potential to have such a diet, but the forces of desire never allow us to practice it. There are people however, who need more intake of food, and such a diet is out of question for them. Obviously, that does not mean that they are not religious or pious. It is by the intake of food that they can practice their devotions and perform deeds of virtue and live their lives according to the dictates of Divine law.

There comes a time in the life of one who has purified his soul and attained the proximity of Allāh, when he has the ability to withstand hunger not only for short periods but also for unusual intervals. This contention may sound absurd in the language of science and experiment, but the experts of Islamic esotericism believe that as the spirit of man strengthens, such phenomena are feasible. Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), the great Shī‘ite philosopher, who is also known as *Sayyid al-‘Uqal*’ (the doyen of intellectuals) in his monumental “*Ish‘arāt wa al-Tanbihāt*” says:

إِذَا بَلَغَكَ أَنَّ عَارِفًا أَمْسَكَ عَنِ الْقُوْتِ الْمَرْزُوءِ لَهُ مُدَّةً غَيْرَ مُعْتَادَةٍ، فَاسْجَحْ  
بِالتَّصْدِيقِ، وَاعْتَبِرْ ذَلِكَ مِنْ مَذَاهِبِ الطَّبِيعَةِ الْمَشْهُورَةِ.

“If you come to know that a Gnostic (*ʿarif*) has refrained for an unusual interval from consuming the little food he has, graciously assent and consider this among the well-known principles of nature.”<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, hunger for those who are not deprived of sustenance and are able to withstand it is highly recommended due to the reasons mentioned above.

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1. al-Mahajjat al-Baydī, v. 2, pg. 124

2. Holy Qurʿān, 2:155

3. Mʿzīn al-Hikmah, v. 2

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. This interpretation is very apt and accurate, for the reality of the human being is his spirit. Necessarily then, his food would be uniform with his spirit. And this food can be nothing but knowledge.

7. al-Burhān Fī Tafsīri'l Qurʿān, pg. 214

8. al-Murʿiqibī, pg. 154 – New ed.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid, pg. 156

12. Sirru'l Isrāʾīl, v. 1, pg. 13

13. Tawdūhu'l Masʿūl of ʿAyatullāh al-ʿUzmā Sayyid ʿAlī S̄st̄n, pg. 495

14. al-Ishārāt wa ʿI-Tanbīhāt, v. 4, pg. 111

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