

The early meal of the Month of Ramadhan (Suhoor)

The Exalted and Praised One has said in His Glorious Book:

"... and eat and drink till the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn, then complete the fast till nighttime" (Qur'an Surah Baqarah 2: 187).

He has also said,

"Little did they sleep during the night, and they sought their Lord's forgiveness in the early hours of the morn" (Holy Qur'an, Surah Dhariyat 51: 17-18).

And the Almighty has also said,

"Those who persevere, and the truthful, and the obedient (to Allah), and those who spend (benevolently), and those who ask forgiveness during the time of the morn" (Holy Qur'an, Surah Ale-Imran 3: 17).

Suhoor is the meal comprised of food and water taken before daybreak by a Muslim who intends to perform the obligation of the fast. It helps him while abstaining from eating and drinking during daytime. This is the *suhoor* in its absolute meaning. Its timing has been defined by the Almighty thus:

"... and eat and drink till the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn" (Holy Qur'an, Surah Baqarah 2: 187).

This means that *suhoor* can be eaten at any time during the night till a short time before daybreak. But what about this "short time" defined before daybreak? Anas ibn Zaid ibn Thabit, may Allah be pleased with him, once said, "The Prophet (S) ate *suhoor* with us once, after that he stood for the prayers." He was asked, "What was the length of time from the *suhoor* till the *athan*?" He answered, "About the time it takes one to recite fifty Qur'anic verses." This tradition is recorded by al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ibn

Khuzaymah.

Muhammad ibn Ya'qub quotes Abu Yahya al-San'ani quoting Imam Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq (as) saying, "If a believer fasts and reads Surat al-Qadr during the time of his *iftar* and *suhoor*, he will be rewarded with the rewards due to a martyr." This tradition is recorded on p. 344, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*.

The real meaning of *suhoor* transcends the physical and nutritious benefits with which it provides the person who observes the fast. Quoting what the Almighty has said explains the real meaning of *suhoor*:

"Little do they sleep during the night, and they seek their Lord's forgiveness in the early hours of the morn" (Holy Qur'an, Surah Dhariyat 51: 17-18).

He has also said,

"The patient, and the truthful, and the obedient (to Allah), and those who spend (benevolently), and those who ask forgiveness during the time of the morn" (Holy Qur'an, Surah Ale-Imran 3: 17).

The first verse tells us that nighttime is the time for sleep, and the zenith of times to adore the Almighty and seek His forgiveness is during the *suhoor* the plural of which is *ashar*. The second verse contains the definition of the status of those who seek their Lord's forgiveness during the *ashar* times, a status which is quite lofty and is compared only to those to whom the Almighty refers as "those who persevere, and the truthful, and the obedient (to Allah)." We may derive the following conclusions from the above-quoted verses:

- 1) The time of *suhoor* has its own status and function which transcends eating and drinking, which help the fasting person during his daytime abstention from both, and this function is to wake up during the night to perform an act of worship.
- 2) The epic of adoration and the seeking of His forgiveness, which the Almighty, out of His divine wisdom, has decreed, is during the time of *ashar*; otherwise, why has He not specified other periods during which His servants adore Him during the glorious month of Ramadhan?
- 3) Allah, the Almighty, has granted those who seek His forgiveness during the times of *ashar* a status which comes out of His blessing, and He includes them among those whom He describes as "those who persevere, and the truthful, and the obedient (to Allah)."

Probably one of the greatest blessings of the Almighty is that He has included those who eat their *suhoor* among those who shall receive His forgiveness so that they will be the ones freed by the Most Merciful One from the fire during the month of the Glorious Qur'an. The commander of the faithful Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib, peace be

upon him, quotes the holy Prophet (S) saying, "Allah, the Praised and the Exalted, and His angels send blessings unto those who take their *suhoor* meal and seek His forgiveness; so, let each one of you

observe *suhoor* even by drinking some water."¹

Ali ibn Muhammad, quoting al-Nawfali who quotes al-Sukooni who quotes Ja'far who in turn quotes his forefathers, Allah's blessings and peace be upon them all, has cited the Messenger of Allah (S) saying, "There is a great deal of bliss in three things: the congregational prayers, the dish of sopped bread and meat (*thireed*), and the *suhoor*."²

Prophet Muhammad (S), as recorded on pages 1063–1064 of *Sahih al-Targheeb wal Tarheeb*, has also said, "The best a believer can eat during the *suhoor* is dates; but if he cannot do so, then let him at least drink some water."

¹ This is also recorded as hadith number 3577 in *Sahih al Jami' al Saghir*, and hadith number 1062 in *Sahih al-Targheeb wal Tarheeb*.

² This is hadith number 1057 among the hadiths of *Sahih al-Targheeb wal Tarheeb*, and hadith number 1045 among the "Series of sahih hadiths."

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