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Points regarding the Intimate Devotions (Munajat) of the Month of Sha'ban

Have you said the *Munajat* of Sha'ban for God, the Blessed and Supreme, during this month of Sha'ban in which it has been advised to recite this devotion from the first until the last month? Have you benefited from its lofty meanings which teach increased faith and knowledge [*ma'rifat*] with regard to the station of the Lord?

It is reported with regard to this supplication that it is the *munajat* of Imam 'Ali, peace be with him and his descendants, and that all of the immaculate Imams, peace be with them, called upon Allah by this devotion. 1 Very few supplications and devotions [*du'a wa munajat*] may be found which were recited by all of the Imams (*'a*) for God.

This devotion is truly an introduction to admonish and prepare man to accept the responsibilities of the blessed month of Ramadan, and it is possible that it is also to remind the aware person of the motive for fasting and its valuable fruits.

The immaculate Imams, peace be with them, have explained many things by the tongue of supplication. The tongue of supplication is very different from the other tongues by which those greats explained precepts. They have explained most spiritual, metaphysical, and precisely divine matters, and that which is related to knowledge of Allah by the tongue of supplication. But we recite supplications to the end and unfortunately pay no attention to their meanings, and we fail to understand what they really want to say.

In this *munajat* we read: "O my God! Grant that I may be perfectly cut off from all else but You, and enlighten the vision of our hearts by the radiance of vision toward You, until the visions of the heart tear through the curtains of light and attach to the Source of Greatness and our souls come to belong to Your Exalted Sanctity." 2

It is possible that the meaning of the sentence, "O my God! Grant that I may be perfectly cut off from all else but You," is that prior to the blessed month of Ramadan, divinely aware people should get ready

and prepare themselves for cutting themselves off and avoiding worldly pleasures (and this avoidance is that very being cut off perfectly from all else but Allah). Being perfectly cut off from all else is not something easily obtained.

It requires extra hard practice, going to some lengths, spiritual exercises, perseverance, and discipline, until one is able to fix one's attention completely on nothing but God and cut himself off from all else. If someone is able to do this, he has reached a great felicity. However, with the least attention to this world it is impossible to be cut off from all else but Allah.

Someone who wants to perform the fast of the blessed month of Ramadan with such manners as he has been asked to, must cut himself off completely from all else so that he can observe the manners for the celebration and feast [of Allah], coming to know of the station of the Host, insofar as this is possible.

According to the order of the Holy Apostle, peace be upon him and his progeny, (which is related in one of his sermons) all of the servants of God, the Supreme, have been invited by Him to a feast in the blessed month of Ramadan and are to be the guests of the Provider at His feast. He says there: "O you people! The month of Allah is approaching you...and you have been invited in it to the feast of Allah." [3]

In this few days until the blessed month of Ramadan, you should reflect, reform yourselves, and pay attention to God Almighty, seek forgiveness for your unbecoming behavior and deeds, and if, God forbid, you have committed a sin, repent for it prior to entering the blessed month of Ramadan. Habituate your tongue to intimate devotions [*munajat*] to God the Almighty.

God forbid that in the blessed month of Ramadan you should backbite or slander, or in short, sin, and so become polluted by transgression in the presence of the Lord, the Exalted, at His feast. You have been invited during this honorable month to the banquet of God the Almighty, "and you have been invited in it to the feast of Allah," so, get yourself ready for the magnificent feast of the Almighty.

At least respect the formal and exoteric manners of fasting. (The true manners of fasting are another matter entirely, and require constant care and effort.) The meaning of fasting is not merely refraining from eating and drinking, one must also keep oneself from sin. This is the primary etiquette of fasting for novices. (The etiquette of fasting for divine people who want to reach the mine of greatness is other than this.)

You should at least observe the primary etiquette of fasting, and in the same way that you refrain from eating and drinking, you should keep your eyes, ears and tongue from transgression. From now on, keep your tongue from backbiting, slander, speaking bad, and lies, and expel from your hearts all spite, envy, and other ugly satanic attributes. If you are able, cut yourself off from all but Allah. Perform your deeds sincerely and without duplicity.

Cut yourselves off from the Satans among humans and the jinn, although we ourselves apparently cannot aspire to reaching such a valuable state of felicity. At least try to see to it that your fast is not

accompanied by sin. Otherwise, even if your fast is correct from the point of view of Islamic law, it will not ascend to be accepted by God. There is a big difference between the ascension of one's works and their acceptance on the one hand, and their religious correctness on the other.

If, by the end of the blessed month of Ramadan, there is no change in your works and deeds, and your ways and manners are no different than they were before the month of fasting, it is evident that the fast which you were expected to perform was not realized, and that which you have done is no more than a vulgar physical fast.

In this noble month, in which you have been invited to the divine banquet, if you do not gain insight [*ma'rifat*] about God the Almighty nor insight into yourself, it means that you have not properly participated in the feast of Allah. You must not forget that in this blessed month, which is the 'month of Allah', in which the way of divine mercy is opened to the servants of God and the satans and devils, according to some reports, are locked in chains. 4

If you are not able to reform and refine yourselves, and to manage and control your *nafs al-ammarah* [the commanding soul], 5 to subdue your selfish lusts and to cut off your relations and interests with this world and material things, then after the end of the month of fasting it will be difficult for you to be able to accomplish this. Therefore, take advantage of this opportunity before the magnificent grace of it vanishes, and purify and reform yourselves.

Get ready and prepare to perform the duties of the month of fasting. Let it not be that prior to the arrival of the month of Ramadan you are like one who is wound up by the hand of Satan so that in this single month when the satans are enchained you automatically busy yourselves with sin and deeds opposed to the orders of Islam!

Sometimes due to his distance from God and the great number of his sins, the rebellious and sinful man sinks so low into darkness and ignorance that he does not need Satan to tempt him, but he himself takes on the color of Satan. *"Sibghatullah"* 6 is the opposite of the color of Satan.

Someone who pursues selfish desires and who is obedient to Satan gradually turns the color of Satan. You should decide at least in this month to control yourselves and to avoid speech and behavior which displeases God, the Supreme. Right now in this very session make a covenant with God that during the blessed month of Ramadan you will avoid backbiting, slander and speaking ill of others.

Bring your tongue, eyes, hands, ears, and other organs and limbs under your control. Manage your deeds and your words. It is possible that this same worthy deed will result in God's paying attention to you and blessing you. After the month of fasting, when the satans are released from their chains, you will have been reformed, and you will no longer listen to the lies of Satan, and you will refine yourselves.

I repeat, decide during these thirty days of the blessed month of Ramadan to control your tongue, eyes, ears, and all your organs and limbs, and pay constant attention to the judgment of the *shari'ah* about the

works you intend to do, and the words you intend to speak and the subject you intend to listen to. This is the elementary and outward manner of keeping a fast. At least keep to this outward manner of fasting!

If you observe that someone is about to backbite, prevent him and say to him that we have made a covenant that during these thirty days of Ramadan to keep ourselves from prohibited affairs. And if you are not able to keep him from backbiting, leave that session. Do not just sit there and listen. The Muslims must be safe from you.

Someone from whose hands, tongue and eyes other Muslims are not safe is not truly a Muslim, 7 although he may be outwardly and formally a Muslim who has formally proclaimed: *"La ilaha illallah"* (There is no god but Allah). If, God forbid, you want to offend somebody, to slander them or to backbite, you should know that you are in the presence of the Lord; you are to be the guest of God the Almighty, and in the presence of God.

The Supreme, you would behave rudely to one of His servants, and to slander one of the servants of God is to slander God. They are the servants of God, especially if they are the scholars on the path of knowledge and piety [*taqwa*]. Sometimes you see that because of such affairs man reaches such a state that he denies God at the moment of his death! He denies the divine signs.

"Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the signs of Allah and used to mock them" (Q 30:10).

These things occur gradually. Today, an incorrect view; tomorrow, a word of backbiting; and the next day, slander against a Muslim, and little by little these sins accumulate in the heart, and make the heart black and prevent man from attaining knowledge [*ma'rifat*] of Allah, until it reaches the point that he denies everything and rejects the truth.

According to some *ayah* of the Qur'an as interpreted through some reports, the deeds of men will be presented to the Prophet (*s*) and the pure Imams (*'a*) and will be reviewed by them. 8

When the Prophet reviews your deeds and he sees how many errors and sins there are, how upset and distressed will he be? You do not want the Apostle of God to become upset and distressed; you do not want to break his heart and make him sad.

When he witnesses that the page of your deeds is replete with backbiting, slander and speaking ill of other Muslims and that all your attention was devoted to this worldly and materialistic affairs and that your heart was overflowing with malice, hatred, spite, and suspicion towards each other, it is possible that in the presence of God, the Supreme and Holy, and the angels of Allah, he will be embarrassed that his community and followers were ungrateful for their divine blessings.

And thus unbridled and heedless they betrayed the trust of God, the Holy and Supreme. Someone who is related to us, even if in a menial position, if he errs, we become embarrassed. You are related to the

Apostle of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be with him and his progeny; by entering the seminary, you have related yourself to the Law of Islam, the most Noble Apostle and the Noble Qur'an.

If you perform ugly deeds, it upsets the Prophet and he cannot bear it, and God forbid, you may be damned. Do not let the Apostle of Allah, peace be upon him and his progeny, and the pure Imams become upset and saddened. The heart of man is like a mirror, clear and bright, and because of too much attention of this world and too many sins, it becomes dark. However, if a person at least performs the fast for God.

The Almighty, sincerely and without duplicity (I am not saying that other acts of worship are not to be pure; it is necessary for all of the acts of worship to be performed sincerely and without duplicity), then this worship which is a turning away from lust, putting aside pleasure, and cutting oneself off from all but God, if it is performed well in this single month, perhaps the grace of God will be extended to him and the mirror of his heart will be cleaned of its blackness and tarnish.

And there is hope that he will change his ways and become dissuaded from this wilderness and worldly pleasures. When the Night of Power [*Laylat al-Qadr*] 9 arrives, one will gain the illumination which is obtained on that night by the friends of God and the believers. The reward of such a fast is God, as it has been reported: "The fast is for me and I am its reward." 10 Nothing else could be the reward of such a fast.

A garden of blessings would not count as a worthy reward for such a fast. If a man takes fasting to mean closing his mouth to food but opening it for backbiting, and in the warm and friendly meetings with company in the nights when there is opportunity and time he engages in backbiting until *sahar*, 11 such fasting will be of no benefit and have no effect. Rather, one who fasts in this way has not observed the etiquette of the banquet of God.

He has violated the rights of his Benefactor, the Benefactor who has provided him with all the means and conveniences of life before creating him, and has provided for the means of his development. He sent the prophets to guide him. He sent down the heavenly books. Man has been given the power to approach the source of greatness and the light of felicity, has been favored with intellect and perception, and has been the recipient of His generosity.

Now, He has invited His servants to enter His guest house and to sit at the table of His blessings where they are to thank and to praise Him to the extent that their tongues and hands are able. Is it right for the servants who benefit at the table of His blessings and who use the means and conveniences which He has freely provided for them that they should oppose their Master and Host and to rebel against Him?

Is it right that they should use these things in opposition to Him against His wishes? Wouldn't this be biting the hand that feeds one and the height of ingratitude for man to sit at the table of his Master and with rude and impudent behavior and actions to audaciously insult his honored Host who is his benefactor, performing ugly and evil deeds before the Host?

The guests must at least know who their Host is, and become aware of His dignity. They should be acquainted with the customs and manners of the sessions. They should try not to rebel by performing deeds which conflict with virtue and decorum. The guests of the Supreme Being must come to know the divine station of the presence of the Lord of Majesty.

A station of which the Imams, peace be with them, and the great divine prophets were constantly seeking greater knowledge and more perfect awareness, and wanted to obtain such a source of light and greatness. “And enlighten the eyes of our hearts with the light of the radiance of looking at you, until the vision of the hearts tears through the curtains of light and is then united with the source of greatness.” The banquet of Allah is that very “source of greatness”.

God, the Blessed and Exalted, has invited His servants to enter the source of light and greatness. However, if the servant is not appropriate, he will not be able to enter into such a splendid and sumptuous position. God, the Exalted, has invited his servants to all sorts of favors and boons and to numerous spiritual pleasures, but if they are not prepared to be present at such lofty positions, they will not be able to enter.

How can one enter the presence of the Lord and the guest house of the Lord of lords which is the source of greatness with spiritual pollution, vices, and sins of the body and soul? It requires merit. Preparation is necessary. In disgrace and with polluted hearts which are covered by veils of darkness, one will not be able to understand these spiritual meanings and truths. One must tear these veils and push aside these dark and light curtains which cover the heart and are barriers to union with Allah so that one will be able to enter the brilliant and splendid divine company.

1. Cf. Iqbal al-A‘mal, Deeds for the Month of Sha‘ban, p. 685; Misbah al-Mutahajjid wa Salah al-Muta‘bah, p. 374; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 91, p. 97-99, “The Book of Dhikr and Du‘a”, chap. 32, hadith 12.
2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 19, part 2, old edition, “bab al-ad’iyyah wal-munajat,” pp. 89-90.
3. From Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 7, p. 227, ‘The Book of Fasting, Chapter on the Month of Ramadan,’ chap. 18, hadith 20.
4. It is reported from Jabir that Abu Ja‘far, Imam al-Baqir, peace be with him, said: “The Prophet of Allah turned his face toward the people and said: ‘O company of people! When the crescent moon of the month of Ramadan appears, the rebellious Satans are locked up, and the doors of heaven, the doors of paradise and the doors of mercy are opened, and the doors of the Fire are shut, and prayers are answered’.” From Wasa’il ash-Shi‘ah, vol. 7, p. 224, “The Book of Fasting,” “The Section on the Precepts of the Fast of the Month of Ramadan,” section 18, hadith 14.
5. The ‘commanding soul/self’ is an expression used in the Qur’an, associated with one’s base desires, cf. Q 12:53. [Tr.]
6. Sibghatullah, the ‘color of Allah’, cf. Q 2:138, is the opposite of the ‘color of Satan’. [Tr.]
7. Abu Ja‘far [Imam al-Baqir], peace be with him, said that the Apostle of Allah, may the peace and blessings of Allah be with him and his progeny, said: “Shall I tell you of the believer? The believer is one whom the believers trust with their lives and their property. Shall I tell you of the Muslim? The Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands the Muslims are safe.” From Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 331, “The Book of Faith and Infidelity,” “Chapter of the Believer, His signs and attributes,” hadith 19.
8. For example:

“And say: Work, so Allah will see your work and (so will) His Apostle and the believers; and you shall be brought back to the Knower of the unseen and the seen, then He will inform you of what you did” (Q 9:105).

Also, Abu Basir reported that Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) said: “The deeds will be reviewed by the Apostle of Allah, peace be with him and his progeny, the deeds of the servants, each morning, the good ones and the bad ones, so be careful. This is what Allah, the Supreme, said: ‘Work, so Allah will see your work and (so will) His Apostle.” Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 318, The Book of Hujjah, Chapter on the Presentation of the deeds to the Apostle and the Imams, peace be with them. Hadith 1, 2-6. Tafsir Burhan, vol. 2, p. 157.

9. The Night of Power is a night near the end of Ramadan in which the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet (s) and which, according the Qur’an is a night better than one thousand nights. Cf. Qur’an, Surah al-Qadr (Chapter 97). [Tr.]
10. Furu al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 63, “The Book of Fasting,” “The Chapter of the Grace of the Fast and the One who Keeps the Fast,” hadith 6
11. Sahar is the period from the first light of the morning until sunrise. [Tr.]

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