

Spring 2022 | Vol. III

Fasting & Feasting

A Fellowship & Fairydust
Seasonal Newsletter

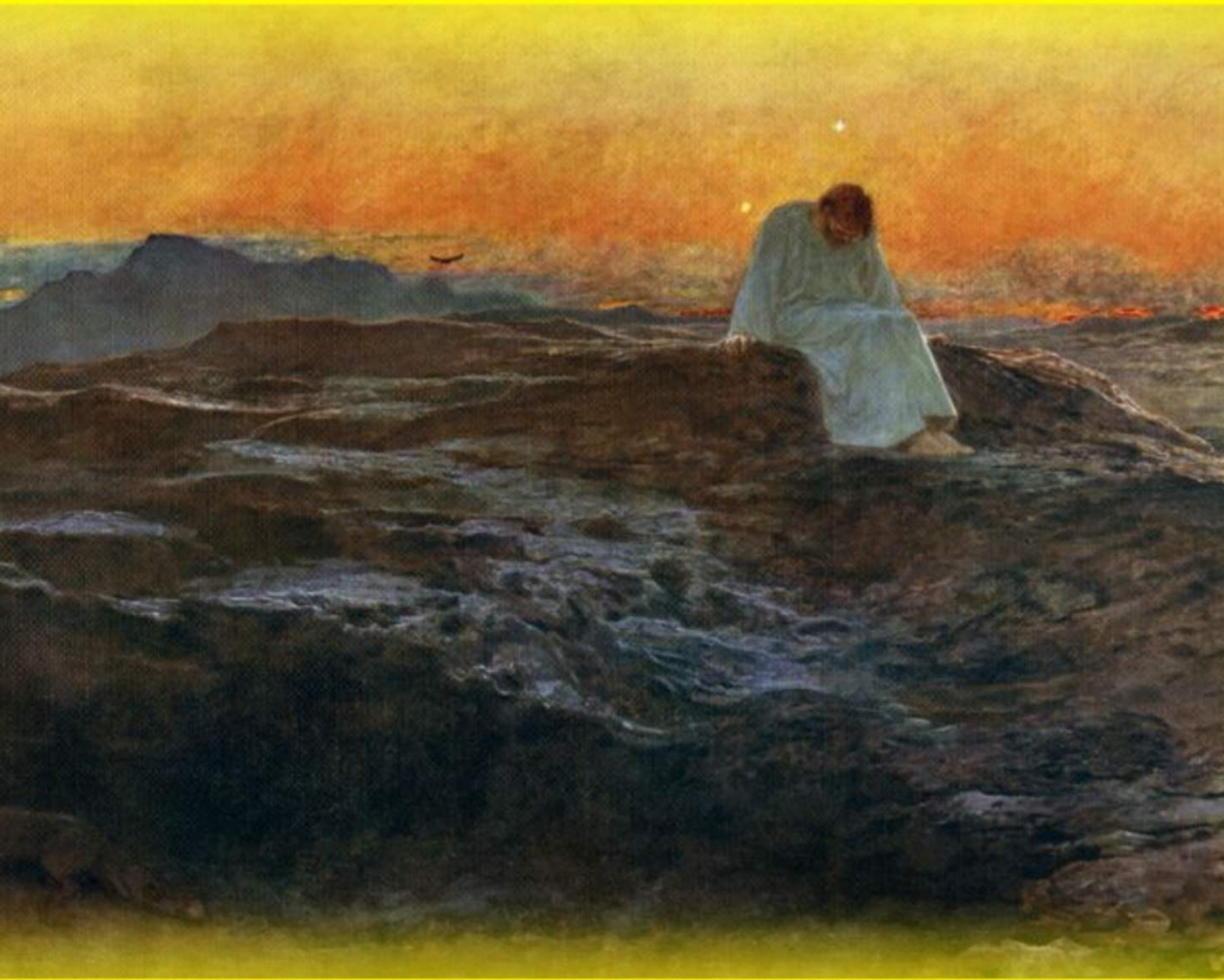


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The Week of Emptiness

By Avellina Balestri

And so it begins
The week of emptiness
When the holy water fonts are drained
And the heart of Christ gushes forth.

Yes, the great emptiness,
As God abandons His temple
And the sanctuary lamp is dimmed.
Darkness falls over the land,
And the world groans for redemption.

We breathe, but barely
As He gasps upon the tree,
Our sinful sign post
That cries out "We are gods!"

Yes, we have tasted that fruit,
And its poison has spread.

Now another fruit hangs,
Peerless and perpetual
For us to grasp.

We must eat it - flesh and blood
Or have no life in us.

It is a cold spring,
Bitter the wind in our face
And the crimson rain in puddles.

The lambs are bleating,
Waiting for their sacrifice,
But the birds are silent

As the sun shrinks to a star.
Sin and salvation kiss
In the crushing eclipse
And what we could not bear is borne
And what we could not tear is torn.
The emptiness will fill us,
Just as every emptiness is filled.
The sparrow that falls
And the tower that crumbles,
The bellies that hunger
And the blessed who mourn...
All reside in the God that is slain,
The heart that is pierced,
The apple transfixed.
Yes, we dwell in the emptiness,
The chamber of secret lovers
And the unborn's sacred womb,
The valley of dry bones
And the ravished garden tomb.



Ramadan Reflections

By Arusha Afsar

With the passing of each moment, day, week, month and having just having survived an apocalyptic three year long pandemic, reaching Ramadan this year was almost like landing on the safety of the 'GO' spot on a monopoly board and collecting \$200.

A much needed mental, spiritual and physical shift was deeply required after a draining period of worldwide lockdowns, no travel, very limited social gatherings and mental exhaustion. It may seem to many that Ramadan would add to these burdens, with no food and water for long hours but to 1.8 billion Muslims across the globe, the experience of Ramadan transcends beyond just the abstinence of food and drink and sexual intimacy during daylight hours to a spiritual retreat from this world and its burdens.

Reflecting back to my childhood, Ramadan began in my mind as colourful crescent moons and hanging stars sweets, guests and sunset feasts. My mother each night would prepare an elaborate array of foods in the evening, an exciting table spread of samosas and gram flour fritters, rice and other delectables. At the end of the meal we shared together as a whole family, I would love a generous dollop of a dates and cream concoction that she would often make as it was my absolute favourite post-iftar sweet treat. We would then scuttle off to the mosque where the

musky scent of sweat combined with Arabian ouds of all kinds sweetened the air. I would get to see my friends from Arabic school and spend the evening giggling together in between prayers, sometimes we would remain there until the Fajr (dawn) prayer where we would share a pre-dawn meal together from big silver platters.

As the years progressed, this understanding of Ramadan slowly evolved to beyond just what was on the menu each night after our fast ended, as I renewed my understanding and re-evaluated thoughts and concepts each time I undertook the arduous task of starving myself and focusing on matters other than food and materialism. With each experienced Ramadan, I learnt new things about it such as abstaining from food and drink to empathise with the needy, about fasting to repair the body and from damage, about giving time to the needs of others rather than just my own needs, about creating a unified community spirit through service to others. I began to experience it from a variety of different angles and each year a new Ramadan mystery would become unravelled to me. With each Ramadan it became an experience of unboxing of spiritual treasures and delights, food for the soul by depriving food for the belly.

This year after another month long of fasting and abstaining from all that would normally be permissible during daylight hours in any other given month, after sacrificing my sleep and swapping my day for night and night for day, I find myself once again sitting here

reflecting about the month-long bootcamp I have just been through. Contemplating about what I have learnt, what I have become and who I most aspire to become once Ramadan draws to a complete end. As I write, three hours are left of Ramadan and the feeling is as if a wonderful guest came with many gifts and treasures to my home and is now leaving. It is a feeling of bittersweet elation of having hosted such an honourable guest and now having to say goodbye until next time. At the end of these 30 days of self-discovery, I have also managed to meet me once again and I through which I learnt about aspects of myself which were unbeknown to me previously due to being so busily engaged with the humdrum of the usual conundrums of what to cook tonight, or what latest Netflix movie to watch, or which project at work I needed to finish. I spent time with myself, re-developing a relationship with God once again, reading the Quran again to remind myself and re-affirm why I had accepted this as my way of life and belief from an intellectual and thoughtful basis.

Most importantly, I have unearthed a new piece of the puzzle that is Ramadan. This time around I have learnt about 'me' in deeper ways than ever before previously. I noticed one thing in particular after 30 days of hunger, is that as humans when we feel full, satisfied and satiated, we don't feel the need for dependency and develop a very false sense of security and self-sustenance. We delude ourselves into thinking that we are our own providers and are not in need of anyone else. Once you take away the essentials such as food, water and sleep, it is only then once

the hunger pangs hit and the belly rumbles, once your lips dry up and you feel the fatigue of lack of sleep during the night, that you actualise how weak and dependent you really are as a human. All arrogance and pride in our own independence diminishes, all egos are forced to retreat and we remember that without a few hours of proper deep sleep and a good meal we are actually quite weak and that we are in constant need of a higher power to maintain and sustain us. This is a persistent theme in the Quran which I encountered this year, where God continuously questions us, his creation to think and reflect about the basic essentials to life which we cannot even provide for ourselves but we take for granted and give little thanks and appreciation to the source that does provide it.

"Have you considered: if your water was to become sunken [into the earth], then who could bring you flowing water?"
(The Quran 67:30)

‘There is a sign for them in the dead earth: We give it life, producing grain from it for them to eat. And We have placed in it gardens of palm trees and grapevines, and caused springs to gush forth in it, so that they may eat from its fruit, which they had no hand in making. Will they not then give thanks?’ (The Quran 36:35)

Were they created by nothing, or are they themselves the creators? (The Quran 52:35)

“And among His signs is your sleep by night and by day and your seeking of His bounty, verily in that are signs for those who hearken” (30.23)

Simply spending some time pondering over these and similar verses in the Quran, reminded me of how we go about our daily lives just taking things as a given, almost worshipping our own selves for all of our accomplishments and progress. Yet when we take away our essential needs and comforts, the stark reality of our neediness becomes apparent. This world and our lifestyles can dupe us into the collective illusion that we are ok and we are able to provide for ourselves, we saw how quickly that was shattered when Covid swept through our lands taking with it many hostages. That illusion of complete self-dependence comes from being constantly full. When our needs are all fully met we have no need for anything and we are full to the brim, we then have no need to remember God in our lives.

So Ramadan this year has shown me that going hungry sometimes is important to remind ourselves of who we really are, realising our weaknesses and dependencies and realising all of that returns us to a state of true gratitude to God in our lives. It reminds me of another beautiful analogy in the Quran describing this lack of appreciation of God that we as humans often default to:

‘If they happen to be aboard a ship ‘caught in a storm’, they cry out to God ‘alone’ in sincere devotion. But as soon as He

delivers them 'safely' to shore, they associate 'others with Him once again'. (The Quran 29:65)

The need for food and drink and the need for sleep and indeed all other needs are a clear reminder to us that actually we are in constant need of God and we are in need of him all the time, he is the true cherisher and sustainer of the universe he is independent, self-sustaining, ever-living and not in need of any of the things we need. Yet we in our arrogance and in our own self-glorification only remember him in times of adversity, when hanging from the edge of a cliff, stranded in a dry desert, drowning in a deep ocean when he is worthy of constant worship and constant glorification. So this Ramadan although I may have been deprived of food in the literal sense, it has definitely given me some food for thought on many other levels.

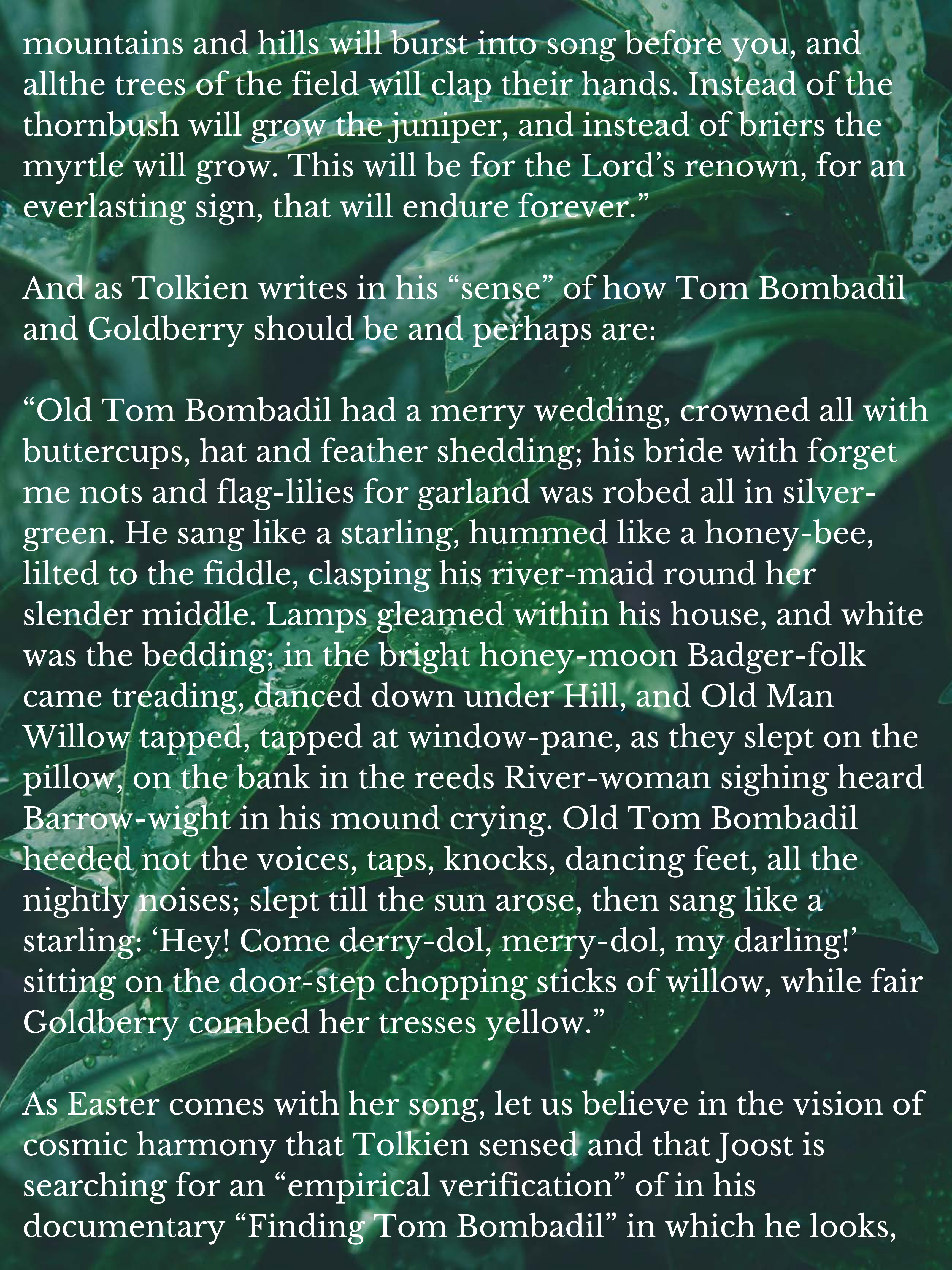


The Refreshing Song at Easter

By Daniel Oscar Rutilio

The Gospels are clear that Jesus saw his death on the Cross like a new Passover, the Jewish festival of deliverance from oppression. In this model Jesus is understood as the Passover lamb, sacrificed in obedience to God the Father, transformed for the liberation of God's people, a shared feast of God's gifts. The sacrifice of the Cross is efficacious for our salvation because it is Jesus completing the work of his incarnation by sharing in our death and hence fully uniting himself with humanity. This means that we, joined to the cosmic body of Christ, will not die in sin, but through his resurrection will share with him in the life of God.

Christ here does not merely take our place as a substitute, but participates in us – as we do in him. Hence, Jesus' blood is spilled for us, not as a vindictive punishment or a human sacrifice to appease God's anger, but as the sharing of his divine lifeblood with us. So what does “Bombadilic” harmony feel like in the Jewish experience and yearning?: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the



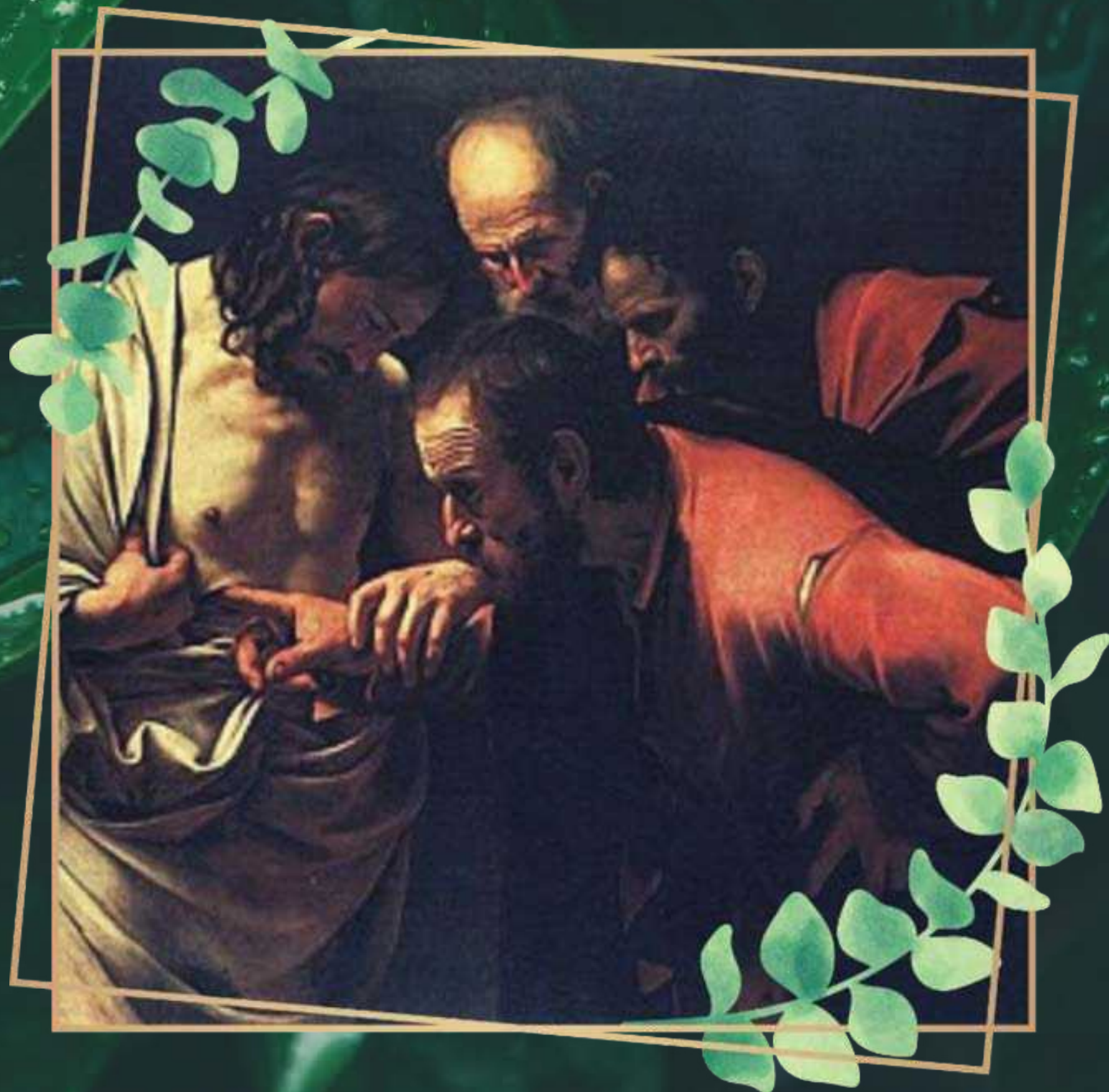
mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever."

And as Tolkien writes in his "sense" of how Tom Bombadil and Goldberry should be and perhaps are:

"Old Tom Bombadil had a merry wedding, crowned all with buttercups, hat and feather shedding; his bride with forget me nots and flag-lilies for garland was robed all in silver-green. He sang like a starling, hummed like a honey-bee, lilted to the fiddle, clasping his river-maid round her slender middle. Lamps gleamed within his house, and white was the bedding; in the bright honey-moon Badger-folk came treading, danced down under Hill, and Old Man Willow tapped, tapped at window-pane, as they slept on the pillow, on the bank in the reeds River-woman sighing heard Barrow-wight in his mound crying. Old Tom Bombadil heeded not the voices, taps, knocks, dancing feet, all the nightly noises; slept till the sun arose, then sang like a starling: 'Hey! Come derry-dol, merry-dol, my darling!' sitting on the door-step chopping sticks of willow, while fair Goldberry combed her tresses yellow."

As Easter comes with her song, let us believe in the vision of cosmic harmony that Tolkien sensed and that Joost is searching for an "empirical verification" of in his documentary "Finding Tom Bombadil" in which he looks,

for Tolkien's enigmatic character (who Tolkien said he "sensed" in our world. I commend Joost - he has inspired me. I am delighted in his sincerity. It reminds me of Thomas the apostle: Now Thomas (also known as Didymus) one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.



3 am-ses: A Hobbit's Ramadan

By Noor Yusuf



When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End awoke in the early hours of a spring morning, it was not by the hand of a ticking clock, nor even the beginnings of a tremulous birdsong by the Shire larks. It was by a sound far deeper and far more pressing. It was of course the rumbling of his stomach. A hobbit eats well, and indeed Mr. Baggins had eaten a hearty meal in the evening just before, but he found that his body kept the rhythms of the day very reliably, which meant that this now must surely be time for Suhur.

This additional meal afforded by the month of Ramadan was one that he enjoyed greatly and to which he had adjusted his routine quite easily. True the fasting month was, generally speaking, perhaps one of the most difficult

times of year for Shire-folk, but Bilbo had come to enjoy it increasingly in his ripening age. Perhaps the swell of years opened the mind up towards a more contemplative pre-occupation, and Bilbo was settling into this wiser lot of decades. Or perhaps he had come to develop such a side to his nature that now he preferred something more of silence over noise, solitude over company, time to write over time to eat; and – though he dared not mention it to his neighbours – prayer even over his pipe.

With a wide yawn, Bilbo climbed out of the warmth of his quilted bed and tied his dressing gown. He poked at the charred logs of the hearth where the smouldering embers of last night's fire still dimly glowed. Spring though it may be, it was still far too cold. He noted on his calendar the date: the 26th night of Ramadan had just passed with the last sunset and so by sunset later, it would again be one of the odd nights. He wondered what particular way he might make this one special.

Given that his engagement tablet was more or less empty over this month, he had taken to filling it with suggestions for himself on how to spend his evenings most worshipfully. The day-time was for him and he appreciated that: he was a very busy hobbit after all, what with all his writings, and it certainly distracted him from the hunger. But the night he liked to give to God and enjoy His most peaceful of companies.

At the gentle insistence of his stomach, Bilbo lit his lamps and made his way to the pantry. A hobbit's pantry was always well-stocked but, given how little of the day was apportioned for food this month, one would think the larder ought to be a little less full than usual. Bilbo had to chuckle: the room was bursting at the seams. He pulled down a plate of scones, a jar of jam, another of honey, the butter-plate, a container of dried cranberries and raisins, roasted hazelnuts and chestnuts, a perfectly rosy apple, a pitcher of milk, some cream, a bowl of sugar, a different type of honey, the pot of last night's soup, a loaf of bread, a modest block of cheese, a plate of olives and a handful of dates of course. A simple meal perhaps, but Bilbo was trying himself at some asceticism. The dates he rationed. They were too precious to eat in excess and he saved them specifically for Ramadan. The Easterlings stocked dates aplenty but that land was too far for a yearly trip. During his tour of Harad, a good many years after his return from Erebor, he had picked up a great sackful of these fine fruits and counted them carefully ever since. Vaults of gold aside, Bilbo considered these amongst the most valuable of Bag End's treasures and he guarded them like a dragon.

The early morning meal was wonderful, long and drawn out. It had to make up for breakfast and second breakfast and elevenses all at once so Bilbo took his time. Now the clock read three o'clock ante-meridian. "My, we ought to call this 3am-ses," he mused. Through his own window he saw the lighted windows of many other houses down the Hill and the wispy streams of smoke trailing up from their

chimneys. He smiled fondly. How he did love his folk. For even in the dark quiet of night, when all were safely tucked away in the privacy of their homes, still – with a lantern in the window, with smoke in their chimneys, with food on their tables – even alone, they all partook together of a good meal, a good intention and the hopes of another good day. “Insha’allah,” Bilbo murmured, “amin.” And it would certainly be a good day, for his dear guests were expected in the evening and his dearest friend, grand old Gandalf, to arrive soon enough.

The Suhur concluded, Bilbo ventured out into his front garden. All was restful in the rolling greens before him. There was the evenstar still bright and shining. And there the graceful moon, nearly diminished, cloaking away its silver, falling at the edge of the horizon. Yes, very soon, the first light of dawn would appear and slowly start to spread over the Shire.

Bilbo unfurled his prayer mat. He had taken to keeping it on the seat out here. The garden was looking lovely, ever since young Samwise had begun tending to it. Sam’s father, Master Gamgee was pre-eminent amongst the growers of their corner of the world, but Bilbo felt that Sam had something special. The lilies and snapdragons and laburnums sprang up like great blooms of fire in the young hobbit’s hands. “Green hands, life-giving hands,” thought Bilbo. “May Allah put grace in those hands.”

And now for another prayer. Bilbo raised his hands. Before Fajr, a vigil of Tahajjud. When Bilbo found his way back to his bed, the embers by now had all died away. There was enough light in the sky for all the lamps to be out outside, but still it was dark enough to sleep. A perfect gloam of deep blue and blossoming violet and yet sleepy light surrounded Bag End and lulled Bilbo to the threshold of sleep. He had only just begun the morning verses of Ali-Imran, before the waviness of slumber covered him over and carried him to his dreams.

Bilbo awoke once again many hours later, rested and perfectly peaceful. His stomach was rumbling again but he knew this time to ignore it. Golden light filled the room and he felt something in him surge. "Good morning," he said to himself and to the angels too. He had begun suspecting their presence, especially since the start of the month. Things were altogether too tranquil than could be his own doing. "It is a good morning, a morning to feel good on and to be good on." He washed and made his ablution, then dressed in a fresh cotton shirt, and his favourite green waistcoat then made his way to the library. For a while, he sat in his chair, rosary in hand, reciting his morning litanies and revising what portion of Quran he had memorised yesterday. Nothing too long or arduous, he hadn't the stamina as the young hobbits did to memorise so much, so quickly.

They were all giving it a go, the youngsters, becoming Huffadh. Otho Sackville-Baggins had appointed himself the Madrasa teacher of the Shire, which made very little sense given he had never studied, but no-one argued with him about it, least of all Bilbo. Otho needed some occupation other than devising plots to legally swindle him out of Bag End. Despite the lack of qualification, Otho at least managed to supervise the young hobbits' Quranic learning and it was coming along alright. Undoubtedly little Fredegar Bolger was the best of them; if angels were not present after all, then they would surely swoop down during the birthday parties, summer fetes and winter bonfires when young Fredegar, or 'Fatty' as he was affectionately known, got up on stage and recited. Everyone loved to listen, especially Bilbo who knew so well the cadences and lilts of the Arabic language that he spent so many years studying alongside Quenya. Fatty had aspirations to be the Shire Muezzin when grown, and Bilbo was sure his calls to prayer would alight all the Shire Folk from their beds one day. But as for Bilbo himself, well-versed and invested he may be, such a task of memorisation he admitted to be beyond him, especially at this age. The only person whom he'd ever known to commit the scripture to memory in old age – after his hundredth birthday – was the Old Took. Bilbo may be competing with him in age, but he could not rival that. Rather he was content to have engraved in his heart just a few of his favourite passages.

He was right now learning an interesting section from Surah Al-Kahf, about the mysterious guide to one of the elder prophets. From Bilbo's study, he ascertained that this referred to Al-Khadir, the Green Man of whom the Holy Prophet spoke. He had always found it fascinating and at times asked Gandalf about it. Of all teachers, Gandalf was certainly the wisest, and guided Bilbo quite all his life. Gandalf was, he fancied, his own Green Man – or at least Grey Man. Perhaps Al-Khadir was in fact one of the wizards of Gandalf's order. But Gandalf kept many secrets, so Bilbo supposed he could never really know.

Bilbo was a literary creature, having spent many years learning the poetries and stories of the elves, the ancients and the Awliya. He had amassed in his library under the hill a fair collection of entirely different histories and peoples in a range of languages from Quenya (whose rudiments he acquired in Imladris), Sindarin, Khazad (for one could not but pick up this roughly hewn yet deeply moving language given one's long acquaintance with its dwarven speakers), Arabic and Persian. The Arabic was certainly most difficult of all and yet somehow the most magical to his tongue. But more than the languages, Bilbo loved to read their literatures. At times he would look at them in parallel, and wonder of the occurrences of their themes and ideas in his own little life. A little life it was and Bilbo knew this well, having lived a life as no other hobbit had, having seen so much of the great wide world, and meeting the lords and ladies of people.

Bilbo would read the discrete literatures and find himself reflecting for hours after on the qualities that connected them to each other. When first he read the elven writings on the Ainulindale, the world's creation from light and song, he at once thought of that beatific Verse of Light: Allahu Nur al-Samawati wa'l Ardh... and how it was written in all those other sacred texts of the Muhammadan Light – or the Haqiqa Muhammadiyya as they called it – the very ability to know God. This was the first thing created and then given into the souls of every living thing, and of them all, most to the Lordly Prophet. When he thought of the legendary Valar, he wondered also of the Asmaa al-Husna, the Names of Allah, and how he could almost find such names manifested in the characters of the Valar of whom the elves spoke with such reverence. Or perhaps the Names were not manifested in characters, but the characters were manifestations of the Names. Or perhaps both at once. The epics of the elven lords and kings, Fingolfin, Gil-Galad, Earendil also rang to remind him of the epics of angels and Prophets, the Awliya Allah, the Rijal Allah, mystical figures, appointed to enact all manner of the secrets of destiny. Even in simpler ways, when he read of the days of Durin, the dwarven forefather, he also would think of the young days of men when the first of them walked in Jannat al-Adn and was taught the names of all things as no other before. Yes, when he read of Melian, he thought of Khadija, the great, great one. And even more beloved to him, when he read of Melian's daughter Luthien, he thought of Khadija's daughter Fatima.

True: in all the history, in all the poetry, in all the figures and personages and heavenly powers venerated by all the people, across all the world, across all of time, there were truths that bound them all. A truth of character: nobility, trust, loyalty, valour, faithfulness. A truth of purpose: to serve, to grow, to venture, to return, to belong, for home. For did not all the ancient elves of the Noldor seek to find a home after their flight? Did not they now hold devotedly to the homes they made in Rivendell, the Greenwood and Loth Lorien. Yet, did they not at once yearn to return to the home they were always destined for in Valinor? And the dwarves: for all their adventuring, Bilbo knew the reason for the quest of Thorin Oakenshield and all his honourable company, for its reason had rung so true to his own heart that it had taken him with them: to go home, to go home. A hobbit understood that in the very core of his being.

And alike, in the stories of every one of the Awliya, in all the searching and striving, their litany was: from Allah we have come, to Him we return. All to return to the place they belonged. Whatever the place of one's belonging, at whatever level it was considered, be that a warm hearth, or an ancestral mountain, or a legendary shore beyond the sea, or the embrace of God, it was home. And home was one thing: love. Every person of whom Bilbo read possessed these things: truth of character, truth of purpose, and love, their truth of being.

“Ah, me and my philosophising,” mumbled Bilbo. He shook his head at himself. What should such a little fellow know of such things? Yet he believed it deeply. And he wished it for himself, for what more could one wish for than to know and to embody truth? He supposed, he could only do his part and bring something of it into his mornings and evenings. He sat for a while, pen and ink at hand, and scribed away in the Red Book. He wrote in here his life story and all he learned of his strange and wondrous glimpses at truth. He found it in brotherhood, fellowship, as he travelled with Thorin’s company. He found it in learning and lore, during his stay at Lord Elrond’s Last Homely House east of the sea. He found it in the dark caves and tunnels where he had riddled with Gollum, a flicker of mercy, of seeing beyond the façade of the thing to the real deepness within it: to find that Haqiqa Muhammadiyya even in such a creature as that. He found it in Bard’s quiet courage and unyielding determination in Lake Town. He found it in guidance and reassurance from his oldest friend and wisest teacher Gandalf. And, most importantly of all, he also found it in himself, when he faced fire and terror, desolation, madness – and in that moment knew what was right. Perhaps it did not matter to write it all down, for at the very least he had learnt the lessons himself. Who else would read such a long tome as the Red Book had become?

But it was his final act; his attempt at service and collecting the lessons of a long life lived in love. He would leave this to Frodo, his young cousin. Frodo, although no-one knew it

yet, was one of those figures. Bilbo hadn't known it himself for a while but something about turning one hundred seemed to bring about an eye of insight in him. Gandalf had also mentioned something of it. Yes, who was to know where it may lead him? But Frodo was one of those who had in him the truth.

Bilbo went walking after this, quite a way down in Buckland, along the Baranduin river and he stayed there in the softness of the grass and the shade of the trees and washes of water until the sun fell low, small as a piece of gold, and the ink stains of night began to seep into the edges of the world. Soon it would be time for iftar, breaking fast! Bilbo hurried back to Bag End; how fast the time had passed. And he had guests! Rushing in, he lit the fire and began to prepare a hearty meal. He'd not had quite such a party as this since the dwarves had come to his door and confusticated him. But now he looked forward to the company of dear friends.

Soon enough, there they were, gathered behind the round green door of Bag End. He welcomed them all in. There was Gaffer Gamgee and Samwise, there the tumble of Meriadoc and Peregrine – or Merry and Pippin, as better suited them – children of his cousins and good friends of Frodo. Frodo was already there of course: he lived with Bilbo but had spent his day out and abroad, or sitting and reading while Bilbo wrote. But there were more than hobbits visiting today. Just as the adhan rang out across the Shire for Maghrib, another came to the door and Bilbo

rushed to open it. “Balin, salaam alaykum!” he smiled and hugged his old friend. “At your service and alaykum salaam,” replied Balin, dipping down into such a deep bow that his long white beard touched the doorstep. Bilbo was delighted that Balin had come: he would soon be away for the Mines of Moria and this perhaps would be the last they would see each other for a while.

Breaking fast was a wonderfully joyous affair. Bilbo emptied out quite the entire pantry and laid a glorious banquet of fruits and vegetables, soups and stews, meats and fish, cheeses, milk, tea and coffee, loaves of bread, pies and pastries, cakes and biscuits and sweets – and all the rest of the dates in his treasury! They kept themselves to only about half of all the food: after all, breaking fast is only to satisfy the bite of hunger before prayer. After that they ate the other half of the food and, once again, Bilbo congratulated himself on his own restraint and told them all about his foray into the ascetic life. So they sat for a good hour afterwards and played their instruments, taking turns singing. The young hobbits recited what new Quran they had learnt. Gaffer gaffed a good deal. And as usual, it all culminated in Bilbo and Balin telling the story of Bert, Tom and William – the trolls who caught them but ended up, by Gandalf’s cleverness, turning to stone.

“When will we see Gandalf?” asked Frodo, for Frodo of them all loved Gandalf the most.

“Soon, soon, my boy, he’s leading Tarawih and it’s just about time to head off there now!”

Before they left, they all cleaned up and donned their clothes for prayer. It was always nice to wear something a bit special when going to speak with God. Bilbo swapped out his green waistcoat for a velvet one in plum.

Tarawih, the prayer of rest, the long vigil of night. Twilight deepened and stars gathered and the wind hummed a low tune as all the hobbits of the Shire made their way down from the holes in the hills to the moonlit hall of prayer in the open fields. The 27th night was upon them and perhaps this was the night: the Night of Destiny.

Not many of them knew what exactly that meant, but very many of them felt it. The few who didn’t had probably eaten a little too much for iftar, even for hobbits. Bilbo walked so freely under the cool night air that he scarcely noticed the Sackville-Bagginses hurrying towards him with that unfortunate glint of resolve in their eyes.

“Gracious, Lobelia,” he stuttered when his strong-willed cousin came before him with yet another paper from the Mayor’s office, lazily written, about how her ownership of Bag End was entirely valid after Bilbo disappeared from the Shire. “My dear Lobelia,” Bilbo sighed, “it was fifty years ago.” When she did not appear to make a move away, he said, “well listen. It may well be the Night of Destiny. If Bag End is really in your lot, I’m sure Allah will clear up the matter for you this very night! Why don’t you go off and pray and so will I.” Lobelia, somewhat baffled by this

response, had to agree that it was the only thing for it. Her husband Otho was appeased easily enough when Bilbo added, “and the young hobbits’ memorisation is coming along very well!”

Bilbo heaved a great sigh of relief when the two of them made their way to join the prayer. Every encounter with Sackville-Bagginses was unpleasant, but he was able to restrain himself this time with a strength that only Ramadan could provide. It occurred to him that this may be one of those moments where he might like to disappear in that special way he did, but come to think of it, he hadn't felt any inclination towards that old ring of his since, well, since the new moon.

Many joined the rows of the prayer. Hobbits especially but also a few travellers staying at the Green Dragon Inn, and even a few from the Prancing Pony which made for an eclectic congregation. But a lovely grace fell about the place of prayer when from the woodlands came a concourse of bright-eyed, silk-clothed elves. Wood elves were a wondrous sight to see, especially for the young hobbits; at times they passed through on their way to the ships in the west. And at last came Gandalf. He strode in with smiling eyes beneath his bushy eyebrows. And as ever, he was Gandalf, without air or pretence, and yet with a grace that ran so deep that not even his dusty well-worn grey robes or crooked wizard’s hat or big boots could cover it. Of course, every hobbit there simply saw that: grey robes, a crooked hat and boots. But no, Bilbo did not. Bilbo saw, as for so

long he had seen, the light of an eternal fire; the mystic, the ancient; one of those who had the truth.

The prayer was long and restful. The clouds and constellations circled above, keeping time as the melodies of the recitation wound out in a spiralling spell over those who prayed. And Bilbo prayed. Where his life had come, where his life would go, where he was right now: it was all present in him, in his mind, in his heart. All of it he gave forth as he prayed and all of it was received and returned greater and more beautiful. Oh, for home! For home! Bilbo's eyes closed and his breathing stilled.



Easter Hymn

By Sophia Helmkamp

We lift up our voices, sing praise to our Savior,
For death now is vanquished and shall be forever:

Our Lord from the tomb has arisen victorious
And reigns now on high with the Father and Spirit
all-glorious.

We hail this Feast Day, the end of our fasting,
That gives us a foretaste of life everlasting;
Though still on this earth we keep vigil in sorrow
And zealously, earnestly watch for the dawn of the
morrow.

Throughout ages past saints this day were
awaiting,
In toil and labors their faith not forsaking;
In poems and prophecy much was concealed
That here to all people salvation might now be
revealed.

Apostles and martyrs all witness the glory
At this the fulfillment of history's story;
We join in their gladness, for Jesus is living
And comes to His people in mercy, their sins all
forgiving.

To you, Lord, all honor and praise thus be given
From all of Your creatures on earth and in heaven;
We ever to You our thanksgiving are sending
For you are alone of all things the Beginning and
Ending.

Why Ramadan is Considered the Blessed Month

By Hussain Usman Datti

ALLAH in his infinite blessing and mercy gave Muslims one month out of the twelve month in a year, in which they should devote to his worship by prayers, recitation of Al-qur'anul karim, remembrance of ALLAH (Zikr), charity and also abstaining from committing big sins and other sins which can be seen as a small in the eyes of a sinner/society. ALLAH said: "The month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an has been sent down as guidance for mankind containing clear signs which lead (to the straight path) and depreciating (the truth from falsehood).."

Q2:185 by reflecting to the above mentioned verse, we would be able to understand that Ramadan is the month that the Qur'an is being revealed to humankind as a guidance in which if they abide, it takes them to the paradise, because, Qur'an teaches Umma what is good and right, and tells them about the story of ancient ones whom have followed the right path and finished their lives successfully and also gives the story of those people whom have gone astray and ALLAH made their end as bad as worse, so that we can take a lesson from them.

However, is out of the fasting abstaining from wicked mind, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, envyness and grudges toward one another, rather make the forgiveness and well wishes your harbit in order to attained a better reward.

Henceforth, is in the first ten days of Ramadan Almighty ALLAH showers His mercy to muslim, and in the second ten days grants them his forgiveness and the last ten or nine days freed them from hellfire, in accordance to hadith of the prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Moreover, Ramadan teaches muslims ummah how to practice self discipline, self control from lust and desires, sacrifice for one another, empathy to less privilege ones. However, it's narrated that prophet Muhammad PBUH said: "whoever does not leave evil words and deeds while fasting, ALLAH does not needs him to leave food and drink" we would understand that fasting is not only about leaving food, drink and intimacy between couple, is also about improving our behaviours and characters, therefore, extending a helping hands to the less fortunate ones in our societies.

Moreover, it's in the blessed month almighty ALLAH have given the muslim ummah a night better than one thousand months (Laitatul-Qadr) i.e Night of Power in which the complete Holy Qur'an is sent down to sama'ud-duniya (lowest heaven) ALLAH said: "The night of power is better than a thousand months.." Q97:3 "whoever prays on the Night of Power out of faith and sincerity, shall have all their past sins forgiven" Al-hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim. However, if a believer was lucky to met this particular night and woke up, prays or did some acts of ibada and ask ALLAH for his needs therefore, ALLAH will definitely, responded to his request.

He Descended into the Darkness and Freed the Captives

By G. Connor Salter

Part I: Friday

I stand here in my cave, my abyss
Weep as I walk further inward.

Into the bowels of my sin,
Here I find my hidden longings.

Dark revolting nameless things,
Fondled hatreds, putrid lusts.
Here my darkest, evil cravings
Walk about, no fear of hiding.

“Oh, I am surely, truly damned!”
I cry aloud in anguish.

“To house such foul designs as this,
To have a mind that holds such urges!”

There cannot be a single thing
In heav’n that would behold this circus
Of my mind’s darkness, and not cry,
“To Hell with you, you heinous creature!”

Part II: Saturday

I sit upon the cavern's rubble,
The hopeless tears run down my face.
My screams rebound off granite walls
I sit and wail, a wretched thing.

A friendly hand lands on my shoulder,
I look up and behold a face
Of royalty and power great,
A man who makes me feel ignoble.

He looks around my vile cave,
The filthy things are all carousing.
Sees the sewage that I house
In all its hideous, obscene carnage.

Part III: Sunday

He looks to me, makes me stand up,
Kisses me upon the brow
Then takes me in his loving arms
Says "Come home, son, it's time to go."

"You've wallowed in this place too long,
Walked too long the halls of loathing.
I care not what you see in you
I only see what I know true."

We walk together up the tunnel
Back towards a light I felt unfit for.
Joyful tears consume my eyes
As I am led to Paradise.

The Splendor of Ramadan

By Abraham Al-Janabi

I'm sure every Christian can recall the first time they were blown away by a spiritual presence at a beautiful church or cathedral. The art and majestic grandeur are awe-inspiring, but these feelings too afflict the atheist. For the believer, there is a mystery beyond that, something deeper – something unmistakably from the spiritual realm. Something of the presence of God.

Imagine now walking up the front steps to the door of that Cathedral. You begin to open the door. As you enter, the inside is not a physical place, but a time. It is the month of Ramadan. Now you know, in part, what it is like to experience Ramadan as a believing Muslim.

During Ramadan, there is a spiritual presence that pervades not a particular place, but rather a window of time. As the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, has said, “the earth was made for us as a place of prostration, and its dust a means of purification.” During the month of Ramadan, everywhere one is overwhelmed with the sense of the sacred.

As the Messenger so eloquently describes in a sermon welcoming the month of Ramadan:

“O people! The month of God has come to you in blessing, mercy, and forgiveness. It is a month that is considered by God to be the best of months. Its days are the best of days, its nights are the best of nights, and its hours are the best of hours. It is a month in which you were invited to be the guests of God, thus you became the people of God’s benevolence. In it, your breath is glorification (of God), your sleep is worship, your deeds are accepted, and your supplications are granted. So, ask God, your Lord, with honest intentions and pure hearts, to support you in your fasting therein and your recitation of His Book, for surely, wretched is he who misses the forgiveness of God in this great month.

Remember, in your hunger and your thirst therein, the hunger and thirst of the Day of Resurrection. Give charity to your poor and needy folk, respect your elders, be merciful to your young, connect with your relatives, guard your tongues, lower your gaze from that which you are prohibited from looking at, withhold from that which you are prohibited from listening to, show mercy to the orphans of (other) people and your (clan’s) orphans, and repent to God of your sins.

Raise your hands to Him in supplication at the time of your prayers, for that is the best time – God looks to His servants with mercy therein, He answers them if they whisper to Him, He fulfills them if they call to Him, He grants to them if they ask Him, and He answers them if they supplicate to Him. O people! Whoever among you feeds a fasting believer in this month, it will be as though, in the sight of God, he freed a slave; and his past sins will be forgiven.

So, it was said: O Messenger of God! Not all of us are capable of that (due to our poverty). So, he said: Fear the Fire, even if by (feeding someone) half a date. Fear the Fire, even if by (offering) a drink of water.”



What A Waste!

By Leah Fisher

The sun weighed on them hot as their troop ventured back towards Bethany after an exhausting day in Jerusalem. The dust kicked up from the road as they walked back to the house of their host was unpleasant for the party's treasurer as he lagged behind the others, estimating the funds by the weight of the moneybag he had strapped to the tie of his robe and the jingling of the coins as it swung. However, the sound of the money did not have the same calming effect on him as it so often did at other times when he would happily siphon a few off the top. The cold clinking of metal had long been a source of comfort to him, especially in the days when they were rejected, but now their lives were on the line again and the good master seemed to have lost sight of everything. The weight of the coins and their rhythmic sway was a stern reminder to him of that, because it should have been heavier.

“Judas! Why the long face?” a slap on the back from the burley fisherman tore him from his thoughts.

“Peter,” his eyes narrowed as he inspected his zealous companion. He was always making a fool out of himself, and this was no exception. He cared too much for the man in charge to see that he would lead them all into perdition. “As thrilling as it is to toss over tables and

have ourselves under constant threat of arrest by the temple authorities, my mind keeps straying back to that dinner we had with Lazarus.”

“Oh, sure!” Peter smiled broadly. “That was great fun, wasn’t it? Man, I can still remember that lamb Martha cooked for us, and the smell of that perfume that Mary—”

“Wasted!” Judas stamped his foot down on the dust-covered road and planted it. Then he turned and grabbed onto Peter’s garment.

Looking him full in the face, he said, “A bottle of pure nard, wasted on the master’s feet! How foolish! Do you realize how much that bottle could have sold for? How many poor and starving people we could have fed?”

“Well, I suppose—”

“This bag” – Judas grabbed the money pouch and shook it at Peter – “could have been made substantially heavier!”

“But Jesus said—”

There Peter was, going at it again. Would he never understand? Jesus had been talking to them about his death the whole trip, and the longer they spent hanging around in Jerusalem, the more likely it was to happen soon. Then what would become of them? They had left everything – their jobs, their homes, and now... for what?

To be led to ruin by the likes of a man whom they once hoped would lead them on to their salvation? To be forever marked as outcasts from among their people and left alone, penniless in disgrace? When everything was said and done, well, Judas knew one thing – it wasn't for him. Whatever Peter did was his own business.

Judas shook his head, indignant. “I know what he said, but I know, too, what is right! The entirety of this affair is being sorely mishandled, and I won't be left holding the bag!”

Peter turned his palms out towards Judas. “Look, even if I die for this, it's worth it to me. Judas, we had dinner with a guy who was dead. Let the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, but you and I know the truth. And where else can we go? Jesus has the words of eternal life, and I am prepared to follow him to the grave, if necessary.”

He looked onward, down the path to the place where his master walked. Then he turned from Judas and went on after him.

Judas watched Peter as he hurried to make up the distance, and shook his head in disgust. The man was running headlong into total disaster, completely unaware. As much as a man like Peter may have believed that he had counted the cost of such fierce loyalty, Judas was himself much more inclined to take control of the situation and allow someone else to pay the price. Such blindness in following would have too great a cost.

Upon reaching Bethany, the band of disciples gathered together at the house of Simon the Leper, whom the Lord had healed of his disease. It was in great joy and thankfulness that Simon had invited them for a feast, which he threw on behalf of their master. There was fine food, merry company, and plenty of wine, just as they had enjoyed at the house of Lazarus some days prior. Judas was standing in the midst of the great multitude of guests when a woman walked by him carrying an alabaster jar. He could tell by the sweet scent that it was filled with fine perfume, and he was taken in by the beauty of the fragrance. His eyes followed the woman as she went to Jesus, who was seated, reclining at the table. Then, the unthinkable happened.

Judas watched wide-eyed in horror as the woman held the jar aloft and poured it over his master. From the locks of Jesus' head, down upon his body, the perfume spilled out over him until he was covered and the room was filled with the beauty of its fragrance.

Judas was irate. How could it have happened again?

He slammed his drink down on the table.

“Why this waste? This could have been sold for a great sum and given to the poor!”

Some of the other disciples murmured, lending their support to him, but Jesus would not hear it.

“Why do you trouble the woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.” He paused and his eyes scanned the room. “Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

The people hushed at his words, wondering, and whispers started up again about what *might* happen, but Judas only shook his head. He'd had quite enough of it. He was no longer interested in what might happen; from now on, he would be the one to make things happen. That way, he could not be taken by surprise. If Jesus was so determined to see his own death, then... he would be willing to help that along. Judas excused himself from the party and went straightway to see the chief priests, because he knew that they would help the master on his way, and it would be a quick way to recover some of his lost funds.

“What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” he asked the men by moonlight, and they handed over to him thirty pieces of silver, – two months' wages – which he found acceptable.

It wasn't long after that Judas ate the Passover with Jesus, who sat him in the place of honor and said as they were eating, “One of you will betray me.”

A feeling of shock and horror plagued the apostles who were gathered there at the table, and they began to say to their master one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" each man gripped with sorrow.

But Judas only smirked when his time came, and thinking he might play along, he said, "Is it I, Rabbi?"

And Jesus said to him, "You have said so."

Thus, Judas went out to those with whom he had conspired and gathered the men. Then he led them to the garden in the midst of darkness and night with the promise of a sign: "The one I will kiss is the man."

And he went to Jesus, saying, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

"Do you betray me with a kiss?" Jesus watched him. "Do what you came to do, friend."

Then came the men whom Judas led and seized his master to arrest him, and when morning came, the chief priests and the elders took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. Thus, they bound him and delivered him up to the governor.

But when Judas heard that Jesus was condemned to die, he could no longer bear the guilt. He rushed himself back again to the place where the chief priests and the elders were gathered.

“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood,” he confessed, overwhelmed by regret.

But they did not share in his remorse. “What is that to us?” they said. “See to it yourself.”

And Judas, despairing, threw the money down at their feet, casting it into the temple, and departed from them to hang himself... *but Christ rose from the grave.*

So, what was the waste? Was it truly the costly praise which was lavished upon our Lord, or was it the life of the man who could see no value in a life given over to God? It is with great joy that we who have poured out our lives unto God receive the hope of the promise of the resurrection.



Ramaḍān: A Month of Spiritual Recharging

By Syed Ali Asdaq Naqvi
By Syed Ali Asdaq Naqvi

Introduction

Ramaḍān is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar and one of the holiest months in the for Muslims. It is the only month out of the twelve to be mentioned by name in the Qur'ān:

البقرة: ١٨٥ ﴿...شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ

“The month of Ramaḍān in which the Qur'ān was revealed, a guidance for the people...” [2:185]

Therefore, one of the many reasons this month is revered by Muslims is because Muslims believe that the revelation of the Qur'ān began in this very month. Fasting is thus obligatory on all able-bodied Muslims who are not travelling and are not subject to other conditions during the holy month. It is to note that this is not the only month in which Muslims fast, because there are many recommended (mustahabb) throughout the year that are mentioned in prophetic ḥadīth. Ramaḍān, however, is the month in which most Muslims fast and carry out acts of devotion and worship due to it being obligatory in those who satisfy the conditions.

Thus, the Qur'ān states:

...فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ...

... So, whoever of you witnesses the month, let him fast in it... [2:185]

There are many merits narrated about this sacred month, including that the devils are (metaphorically) chained in this month, that it is the spring season (الربيع) for the Qur'ān since it is recited frequently during this time. Charity is also recommended during the month, and many Muslims will share their food and donate to those less fortunate during this blessed month to honor it and reap the rewards of doing good work in the month.

Etymology

The word Ramaḍān (رمضان) in Arabic comes from the root r-m-d (ر - م - ض), which means intense or blazing heat, since the month would usually occur during the hottest times of the year. Some reports also state that Ramaḍān is one of God's names, although the scholars of ḥadīth have deemed such reports to be weak. The month existed in the calendar of the pre-Islamic Arabs with the same name. However, we do not find mention of them observing fasts during this month. With the advent of Islām, Muslims started to fast in this month and uphold its holiness due to divine revelation from God.

What does Islām teach us?

There are many wisdoms that have been given as to the reason for fasting. Some Muslims will cite the bodily benefits that are drawn from fasting, while others will mention the spiritual benefits of abstaining from sins and other acts for one whole month (that should be continued throughout the year). Others will cite how this gives them a greater appreciation of what those who are less fortunate go through, which motivates them to be more compassionate towards them and help them in their difficulties. The Qur'an states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ
الْبَقْرَةَ: ١٨٣ ﴿﴾ تَتَّقُونَ

O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed to you just as it was prescribed to those before you so that you may become God-conscious. [2:183]

So, the Qur'an does not deny that people prior to Islām fasted. We even find examples of fasting in Jewish and Christian traditions. Although the details and rulings may vary, the concept of fasting is found within all major world religions including Hinduism. In the Old Testament, the Jews are commanded as such:

וַיְהִי־שָׁם עִם־יְהוָה אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל וּמַיִם לֹא
שָׁתָה וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְחֹת אֵת דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית עִשְׂרֵת הַדְּבָרִים:

28 Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.

- Exodus 34:28

Moreover, in the New Testament, we read:

Τότε ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνήχθη εἰς τὴν ἔρημον ὑπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος, πειρασθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου. καὶ νηστεύσας ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα καὶ τεσσαράκοντα νύκτας ὕστερον ἐπείνασεν.

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

- Matthew 4:1-2

Thus, based on the examples cited above, both Moses and Jesus are said to have fasted for forty days for the sake of God. Some Muslims, in addition to fasting in Ramaḍān, will also continue fasting after the day of Eid (since it is forbidden to fast on the day of Eid) and combine their fast with six more fasts in the month of Shawwāl, the month after Ramaḍān. These six fasts are voluntary, and it is said that fasting in these days is equivalent to fasting all year round.

The reason the Qur'an gives for fasting is for people to become God-conscious. In terms of certain reports that can be cited in explaining some of the wisdoms behind fasting. We shall discuss these in the following section.

The wisdom behind fasting

In the Shī'ī tradition, we find certain reports from the Shī'a Imāms that explain the reasons for fasting in Ramadān. Let us share some of the reasons here:

حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَحْمَدَ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ إِسْمَاعِيلَ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْعَبَّاسِ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا الْقَاسِمُ بْنُ الرَّبِيعِ الصَّحَّافُ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ سِنَانٍ أَنَّ أَبَا الْحَسَنِ عَلِيَّ بْنَ مُوسَى الرَّضَا (ع) كَتَبَ إِلَيْهِ فِيمَا كَتَبَ مِنْ جَوَابِ مَسَائِلِهِ عَلَيْهِ الصَّوْمُ لِعِرْفَانِ مَسِّ الْجُوعِ وَالْعَطَشِ لِيَكُونَ الْعَبْدُ ذَلِيلًا مُسْتَكِينًا مَأْجُورًا مُحْتَسِبًا صَابِرًا فَيَكُونُ ذَلِكَ دَلِيلًا عَلَى شِدَائِدِ الْآخِرَةِ مَعَ مَا فِيهِ مِنَ الْإِنْكَسَارِ لَهُ عَنِ الشَّهَوَاتِ وَاعْظَا لَهُ فِي الْعَاجِلِ دَلِيلًا عَلَى الْأَجْلِ لِيَعْلَمَ شِدَّةَ مَبْلَغِ ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْفَقْرِ وَالْمَسْكِنَةِ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

Imām Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (8th Shī'a Imām), peace be upon him, wrote to someone in answer to some questions. (One was the reason for fasting). The reason for fasting is to know how it feels to be touched by hunger and thirst so that the servant (of God) may be submissive and tranquil, rewarded, accountable, patient, and so that it may be a proof of the difficulties of the hereafter along with what the fasting has of averting him from vain desires and a reminder for him in this world and a proof of the next world. This is so that he may know the difficulty of what the needy people and

destitute go through in this world and the hereafter.

- ‘Ilal al-Sharā’i, vol. 2, p. 378, ‘Uyūn ‘Akhbār al-Riḍā, vol. 2, p. 91, Man Lā Yahḍuruhu al-Faqīh, no. 1767

Another report mentions:

وَعَنْهُ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْكُوفِيُّ عَنْ الْبَرْمَكِيِّ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْعَبَّاسِ
عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا هِشَامُ بْنُ الْحَكَمِ قَالَ سَأَلْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع)
عَنْ عِلَّةِ الصَّيَامِ قَالَ الْعِلَّةُ فِي الصَّيَامِ لِيَسْتَوِيَ بِهِ الْفَقِيرُ وَالْغَنِيُّ وَذَلِكَ لِأَنَّ الْغَنِيَّ
لَمْ يَكُنْ لِيَجِدَ مَسَّ الْجُوعِ فَيَرْحَمَ الْفَقِيرَ لِأَنَّ الْغَنِيَّ كُلَّمَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا قَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ فَأَرَادَ
اللَّهُ أَنْ يُسَوِيَ بَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ وَأَنْ يُذِيقَ الْغَنِيَّ مَسَّ الْجُوعِ
وَالْأَلَمَ لِيَرِقَّ عَلَى الضَّعِيفِ وَيَرْحَمَ الْجَائِعَ فَأَجَابَنِي بِمِثْلِ جَوَابِ أَبِيهِ

The narrator says that I asked Abū ‘Abdillāh (6th Shī’a Imām) about the reason for fasting. The Imām replied, “so that by it the poor and the rich are made equal. This is because the affluent person does not have to face hunger so that he may be merciful towards the poor person, since whenever the affluent person wants to do something, he is capable of it. So, God wanted to do equity between his creation and to make the affluent person taste the touch of hunger and pain so that he may be more compassionate towards the weak person and may be merciful towards the hungry person.” So, the Imām replied to me just as his father (the 5th Imām had done).

- ‘Ilal al-Sharā’i, vol. 2, p. 378, Faḍā’il al-Ashur al-Thalātha, p. 102, Man Lā Yahḍuruhu al-Faqīh, no. 1766

Suḥūr and Iftār

The Suḥūr is when Muslims eat and drink before the Fajr prayer just before the fast starts, so that they are ready to fast for the day. The Iftār is after sunset at the time of Maghrib prayer when Muslim families gather to break their fast together. Even this act of devotion of waking up in the morning to eat and pray and then finally gathering as a family and community to sometimes break the fast at the mosque or at homes is a way of bringing people together and connecting them. The Qur'ān mentions:

...وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ... ﴿البقرة: ١٨٧﴾

... and seek what God has prescribed for you and eat and drink until the white thread is distinct for you from the black thread of dawn. Then, complete your fast till the nighttime... [2:187]

The martyrdom of 'Alī, peace be upon him

There are many other important events that have taken place in this month. Ramaḍān is also the month in which the martyrdom of the first Shī'ī Imām and the fourth rightly guided caliph for the Sunnī Muslims, 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, peace be upon him, took place. He was martyred by a Kharijite, and his martyrdom is said to have been

predicted by the Prophet (ﷺ) as is found in several reports in both Sunnī and Shī'a sources. He was struck on the 19th of Ramaḍān by a sword while praying the morning prayer and passed away on the 21st of the month. Shī'a Muslims mourn the martyrdom of 'Alī, peace be upon him, just as they mourn the martyrdom of the other Imāms from his lineage.

The night of destiny

The Qur'ān talks about the revelation of the Qur'ān in the night of destiny:

القدر: ﴿١﴾ إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

Surely, we revealed it [i.e., the Qur'ān] in the night of destiny. [97:1]

It then states about the night's merit:

القدر: ﴿٣﴾ لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

The night of destiny is better than a thousand months. [97:3]

Muslim traditions reported from the Prophet (ﷺ), the Imāms from his progeny, his companions and so on discuss the night of destiny and mostly agree that the night falls someone in the last ten nights of Ramaḍān. This would mean that the Qur'ān was also revealed in the last ten nights.

Some state that these are the odd nights out of the ten, meaning the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th and 29th and that one may find the night of destiny in any of them. Muslims will worship in these nights to get the reward of more than a thousand months. Worship is highly recommended, and there are many different statements from the righteous predecessors (salaf) as to the exact date on which this night falls. Some reports in the Sunnī tradition mention that the Prophet(ṣ) was told by God about the exact night but was caused to forget it (see: Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 1167). However, there are numerous statements which say that the night falls on one of the last three nights or that it is the 21st. The reason for the date being ambiguous according to some Muslims is so that a person makes the most out of all these nights and worships in all of them sincerely.

Tahajjud / Tarāwīḥ

Recitation of the Qur'ān during Ramaḍān is highly stressed, with many prophetic ḥadīth stressing recitation of the Qur'ān in the month. In addition to fasting during the day and praying during the nights, many Muslims will perform other voluntary prayers known as Tarāwīḥ prayers which are found in certain reports. Muslims will listen and recite the Qur'ān during these prayers and the recitation of the entire Qur'ān is completed in these 30 nights. For Shī'a Muslims, they do not pray the Tarāwīḥ prayer in the mosque and have their own prayers at

home which amount to 1000 units (raka'ahs) of prayer to be prayed during the 30 nights. However, in both cases, we find that voluntary prayers are observed, and Muslims stay up late into the night in devotion to God and try to connect to him through prayer.

Spiritual retreat ('itikāf)

In addition to all these practices, some Muslims will perform 'itikāf, which is a practice where Muslims will sometimes voluntarily stay at a mosque for the last 10 days of Ramaḍān for worship, with no contact with the outside world and only performing acts of worship in the duration of their stay. There are many jurisprudential (fiqhī) rules associated with 'itikāf that must be observed for it to be considered valid.

Fiṭrah and Eid al-Fiṭr

At the end of the month, Muslims will celebrate the holiday of Eid. There are two Eids that Muslims celebrate universally, Eid al-Adḥā, which is the holiday of sacrifice, and Eid al-Fiṭr, which is the holiday of the end of fasting and in which many Muslims who meet the conditions also pay the Zakat al-Fiṭr. This all part of the overall message of developing compassion for those in need and helping them out, becoming spiritually uplifted and continuing these actions not only in this month alone but in the other 11 months of the year as well.

Some narrations about the spiritual side of fasting

One must know that fasting is not only to do with forsaking food and drink, but it goes much deeper than this. All the month is surrounded in worship and devotion to God, and one must make sure that their tongue, mind, and heart also fast along with their body. The 4th Shī'a Imām discusses fasting in this manner:

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الصَّوْمِ فَإِنَّ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ حِجَابٌ ضَرَبَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى لِسَانِكَ وَسَمْعِكَ وَبَصْرِكَ وَفَرْجِكَ وَبَطْنِكَ لِيَسْتُرَكَ بِهِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَهَكَذَا جَاءَ فِي الْحَدِيثِ «الصَّوْمُ جُنَّةٌ مِنَ النَّارِ» فَإِنْ سَكَنْتَ أَطْرَافَكَ فِي حَجَبَتِهَا رَجَوْتَ أَنْ تَكُونَ مَحْجُوبًا. وَإِنْ أَنْتَ تَرَكْتَهَا تَضَطَّرِبُ فِي حِجَابِهَا وَتَرْفَعُ جَنَابَاتِ الْحِجَابِ فَتُطَّلِعُ إِلَى مَا لَيْسَ لَهَا بِالنَّظَرِ الدَّاعِيَةِ لِلشَّهْوَةِ وَالْقُوَّةِ الْخَارِجَةِ عَنِ حَدِّ التَّقِيَّةِ لِلَّهِ لَمْ تَأْمَنْ أَنْ تَخْرِقَ الْحِجَابَ وَتَخْرُجَ مِنْهُ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

As for the right of fasting, then it is that you know that it is a veil which God has put over your tongue, ears, chastity, and stomach so that he may guard you from the hellfire by it. Thus, it has come in the ḥadīth, “fasting is a shield from the hellfire.” So, if your sides remain stationary in the veil you will hope to be veiled. But if you leave it you will shake in the veil and you will lift the sides of the veil and look at what is not lawful for you and calls towards vain desires and powers that are outside the domain of fear of God. You will then not be safe from tearing the veil and exiting it. There is no power save with God.

- Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl, pp. 258 – 259, al-Amālī by al-Ṣadūq, no. 610, al-Khiṣāl, p. 566 etc.

The Prophet(ṣ) is reported to have said:

يا جَابِرُ! هَذَا شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ! مَنْ صَامَ نَهَارَهُ وَقَامَ لَيْلَهُ وَغَفَّ بَطْنَهُ وَفَرَجَهُ وَكَفَّ لِسَانَهُ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ كَخُرُوجِهِ مِنَ الشَّهْرِ. فَقَالَ جَابِرُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! مَا أَحْسَنَ هَذَا الْحَدِيثَ. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: يَا جَابِرُ! وَمَا أَشَدَّ هَذِهِ الشُّرُوطَ.

O Jābir! This is the month of Ramaḍān. Whoever fasts in its daytime and stands in prayer during its night and remains pure regarding his stomach and chastity, and restrains his tongue, exits sins just as he exits the month.” Jābir said, “Messenger of Allāh, how good are these words!” The Messenger of Allāh(ṣ) replied, “O Jābir! How difficult are these conditions!”

- al-Kāfī, vol. 4, p. 87, Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām, vol. 4, p. 196 etc.

The 1st Shī’a Imām, ‘Alī (as), states:

كَمْ مِنْ صَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ صِيَامِهِ إِلَّا الْجُوعُ وَالظَّمَأُ، وَكَمْ مِنْ قَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ إِلَّا السَّهَرُ وَالْعَنَاءُ. حَبَّذَا نَوْمُ الْأَكْيَاسِ وَإِفْطَارُهُمْ

How many people who fast do not gain anything from their fast except hunger and thirst, and how many people who stand up in prayer do not get anything except sleeplessness and suffering.

How many people who fast do not gain anything from their fast except hunger and thirst, and how many people who stand up in prayer do not get anything except sleeplessness and suffering. How good is the sleep of the wise ones as well as their breaking of the fast!

- Nahj al-Balāgha, vol. 4, p. 35, Khaṣā'is al-A'imma, p. 104, Rawḍat al-Muttaqīn, p. 350, Musnad Aḥmad, no. 241 (from the Prophet)

He also states:

نَمَا هُوَ عِيدٌ لِمَنْ قَبِلَ اللَّهُ صِيَامَهُ وَشَكَرَ قِيَامَهُ، وَكُلُّ يَوْمٍ لَا يُعَصَى اللَّهُ فِيهِ فَهُوَ عِيدٌ.

The Eid is only for the one whose fast is accepted and his standing in prayer is lauded. Every day in which God is not disobeyed is an Eid.

- Nahj al-Balāgha, vol. 4, p. 100, Rawḍat al-Muttaqīn, p. 354

It is reported from the 6th Imām:

عِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنِ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ سَعِيدٍ عَنِ النَّضْرِ بْنِ سُوَيْدٍ عَنِ الْقَاسِمِ بْنِ سُلَيْمَانَ عَنْ جَرَّاحِ الْمَدَائِنِيِّ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) قَالَ إِنْ الصَّيَّامَ لَيْسَ مِنَ الطَّعَامِ وَالشَّرَابِ وَحَدَهُ ثُمَّ قَالَ قَالَتْ مَرْيَمُ إِنْ نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا أَوْ صَوْمًا صَمْتًا وَفِي نُسْخَةٍ أُخْرَى أَيْ صَمْتًا فَإِذَا صُمْتُمْ فَاحْفَظُوا أَلْسِنَتَكُمْ وَغُضُّوا أَبْصَارَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا وَلَا تَحَاسَدُوا قَالَ وَسَمِعَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) امْرَأَةً تَسُبُّ جَارِيَةً لَهَا وَهِيَ صَائِمَةٌ فَدَعَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) بِطَعَامٍ فَقَالَ لَهَا كُلِي فَقَالَتْ إِنْ صَائِمَةٌ فَقَالَ كَيْفَ تَكُونِينَ صَائِمَةً وَقَدْ سَبَبْتَ جَارِيَتِكَ إِنْ الصَّوْمَ لَيْسَ مِنَ الطَّعَامِ وَالشَّرَابِ قَالَ وَقَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) إِذَا صُمْتَ فَلْيَصْمِمْ سَمْعَكَ وَبَصْرَكَ مِنَ الْحَرَامِ وَالْقَبِيحِ وَدَعِ الْمِرَاءَ وَآذَى الْخَادِمِ وَلْيَكُنْ عَلَيْكَ وَقَارُ الصَّيَّامِ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَوْمَ صَوْمِكَ كَيَوْمِ فِطْرِكَ.

Abū ‘Abdillāh, peace be upon him, said, “fasting is not from food and drink alone.” Then he said, “Mary said, ‘I make a vow to the Most Merciful to fast.’ [19:26] Meaning, a fast to remain silent.’ So, when you fast, guard your tongues and lower your gazes (from looking at what is forbidden) and do not quarrel or be jealous of one another.” The Imām further said, “The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) heard of a woman who insulted a maid of hers while she was fasting. So, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) brought some food and said to her, ‘eat.’ She said, ‘I am fasting.’ So, he replied, ‘how are you fasting when you have insulted your maid? Fasting is not from food and drink.” Also, Abū ‘Abdillāh, peace be upon him, has said, “when you fast, then let your ears and eyes fast from what is impermissible and obscene. Also, leave quarreling and hurting the servant. You should have the dignity of fasting showing on your and do not make the day you fast like the day you are not fasting.

- al-Kāfī, vol. 4, 87, Man Lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh, no. 1855 & 1862, Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām, vol. 4, p. 194

Some scholarly sayings on fasting

The Shī'ī scholar al-Narāqī writes:

ينبغي للصائم ان يفيض بصره عن كل ما يحرم النظر إليه، او يكره، أو يشغل القلب ويلهيه عن ذكر الله تعالى، ويحفظ اللسان عن جميع آفاته المتقدمة، ويكف السمع عن كل ما يحرم او يكره استماعه، ويكف بطنه عن الحرام والشبهات، ويكف سائر جوارحه عن المكاره.

So, the person who fasts should lower their gaze from everything that it is impermissible to look at, or is disliked, or preoccupies their heart or causes it to be negligent of the remembrance of God almighty. They should also guard their tongue from all the previously mentioned faults and should restrain their ears from whatever is impermissible or disliked to listen to, and restrain their stomach from the impermissible and dubious matters, and restrain all other both parts from disliked matters.

Jāmi' al-Sa'ādāt, vol. 3, p. 380

So, fasting is not just about abstaining from food and drink, but more about focusing inwards and protecting oneself against spiritual impurities. The month is about

remembering God and sacrificing our daily routines to remember him and his blessings, since humans in general only value things when they lack them. In this way, when we as humans will even lack the basics of food and drink in the daytime, we will value them more as being blessings and sustenance from God that we should be thankful for and share with others.

The Sunnī scholar al-Ghazālī states in the *Alchemy of Happiness* (in Persian):

و دو خاصیت است روزه را که بدان مستحق این نسبت است: یکی آنکه حقیقت وی ناکردن و باز داشتن است، و این باطن است و از چشمها پوشیده و ریا را به وی راه نَبُود، چه، به شب نیت کند. و دیگر آنکه دشمن خدای تعالی - ابلیس - است؛ چه، لشکر وی شهوات است، و روزه لشکر وی را بشکند، که حقیقت وی ترک شهوات است. و برای این رسول (ص) گفت که شیطان در درون آدمی روان است، چون خون در تن وی: باید که راه گذر بر وی تنگ بکنی به گرسنگی.

There are two special traits of fasting. One is abstinence, this is interior and hidden from the eyes of people and cannot be used to show off. This is because a person intends it by night. The other is that the enemy of God Almighty is Iblīs. His armies are the futile desires and the fast defeats his armies since the reality of fasting is forsaking vain desires. Therefore, the Messenger(ﷺ) has said that Satan runs inside humans just as blood runs in his body. So, you must make his pathway constricted with hunger.

- Kīmīya-i-Sa'ādat, vol. 1, p. 208

The Sunnī scholar Ibn al-Jawzī states regarding fasting:

وَلِلصُّومِ آدَابٌ يَجْمَعُهَا: حِفْظُ الْجَوَارِحِ الظَّاهِرَةِ وَحِرَاسَةُ الْخَوَاطِرِ الْبَاطِنَةِ،
فَيُنْبَغِي أَنْ يُتْلَقَ رَمَضَانُ بِتَوْبَةٍ صَادِقَةٍ وَعَزِيمَةٍ مُوَافِقَةٍ. وَيُنْبَغِي تَقْدِيمُ النِّيَّةِ
وَهِيَ لَازِمَةٌ فِي كُلِّ لَيْلَةٍ، وَلَا بُدَّ مِنْ مُلَازِمَةِ الصَّمْتِ عَنِ الْكَلَامِ الْفَاجِحِ
وَالْغِيْبَةِ فَإِنَّهُ مَا صَامَ مَنْ ظَلَّ يَأْكُلُ لِحُومِ النَّاسِ، وَكَفَّ الْبَصَرَ عَنِ النَّظَرِ إِلَى
الْحَرَامِ، وَيَلْزَمُ الْحَذَرَ مِنْ تِكْرَارِ النَّظَرِ إِلَى الْحَلَالِ.

And there are some etiquettes to fasting, which are: protecting the apparent limbs and guarding the inner thoughts. So, one must start Ramaḍān with true repentance and a determination of accordance. It is also necessary to put forward the intention, this is necessary every night. Moreover, one must conform to silence regarding foul speech and backbiting, because the one who eats the flesh of people (i.e., backbites) has not fasted. One must restrain the eyesight from looking at what is impermissible and must be alert about repetitively looking at what is permissible.

- al-Tabṣīrah, vol. 2, p. 74

Ibn al-Qayyim says:

فالصوم هو صوم الجوارح عن الآثام وصوم البطن عن الشراب والطعام، فكما أن الطعام والشراب يقطعه ويفسده فهكذا الآثام تقطع ثوابه وتفسد ثمرته، فتصيره بمنزلة من لم يصم.

So, fasting is the fasting of the limbs from sins and the fasting of the stomach from drink and food. So, just as food and drink makes the fast void and corrupt, similarly do sins make the reward void and rotten the fruit (of the fast). So, such a person becomes like the one who did not fast.

- al-Wābil al-Şayyib, pp. 27 – 28

There is also a report (whose authenticity is disputed) which states:

نوم الصائم عبادة

The sleep of the fasting person is (also an act of) worship.

al-Maḥāsin, vol. 1, p. 72, Qurb al-Isnād, no. 324, al-Kāfī, vol. 4, p. 64, Da'ā'im al-Islām, vol. 1, p. 270, Thawāb al-A'māl, p. 51, Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, no. 1783, Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām, vol. 4, p. 190, Shu'b al-Īmān, no. 3652 – 3653

This report, although disputed in its attribution to the Prophet(ṣ), shows that every act the fasting person performs is transformed into an act of worship. This is because during his or her state of fasting, the person is in complete submission to God, and anything done in

complete submission to God, even if it be sleep, is an act of worship. This is the essence of Islām and its conception of worship because worship is not limited prayer or fasting alone, but every act can be converted into worship if done for God's pleasure.

There are many other verses, ḥadīth, statements of scholars and beneficial points that one could cite in relation to fasting, the month of Ramaḍān, but we suffice with this much.

Conclusion

We have discussed the main features of the holy month of Ramaḍān and some of the wisdoms and philosophical aspects of why Muslims worship the way they do in this month. Taking all of this into consideration, one must know that Ramaḍān is not merely about fasting and feasting, but it has deep spiritual and symbolic significance within the significance. It represents the internal struggle, the greater jihād (الجهاد الأكبر) that all of us go through in our day to day lives.



The Sacredness of Fasting and Feasting

By The Traveling Troubadour

Fasting and feasting have both been integral parts of religious cultures since the dawn of time and are mentioned repeatedly in Holy Scripture. Prior to His Passion and death for the redemption for our sins, the Son of God entered into the desert to be in union with the Father through forty days of fasting and prayer. While there, He faced relentless attacks of arrogance and pride by the ancient serpent and his demonic legions.

In a desperate attempt to break the steadfast resolve of the Christ, Satan enticed Him to transform stones into bread. Jesus resisted and replied: "It is written: One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." The concerted efforts to demoralize Him were in vain as He repudiated the false absurdities of worldly power, pointing instead to His Father's authority as the Creator of the Universe. He responded with a stern warning: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

In remembrance of the Savior's solitude under siege, various Christian denominations observe the Lenten Season. Catholics and Orthodox are especially focused on replicating His journey into the barren wilderness through mortification, purgation, and a purification of all the senses of the body, mind, and soul. The Catholic faithful go to the sacrament confession and meditate on Christ's

Passion by reciting the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary and walking the way of Calvary by participating in the Stations of the Cross.

After this cleansing period of preparation comes the Triduum that begins on Holy Thursday. The Last Supper, also known as the Paschal Feast, took place in the Upper Room when Our Lord instated the Holy Eucharist, saying "This is My Body; This is My Blood. Do this in memory of me." This sacrificial remembrance and adoration has been passed down through apostolic succession by the rite of holy inheritance. It is a sacred ritual of liturgical tradition which continues till to present day at every hour through the gift of the Holy Priesthood. By participating in this awe-inspiring ceremony with a contrite heart and pure intentions, we become one with Christ as we can delve into the fathomless depths of our beliefs. Receiving The Bread of Life through the miracle of the transubstantiation brings Him directly into our midst in the most intimate way possible.

Following Holy Thursday comes Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and finally the culmination of Holy Week on the glorious Feast of the Resurrection of the Redeemer. Easter Sunday is the holiest day on the Gregorian liturgical calendar and is celebrated worldwide with triumphant rejoicing. The marble altars are decorated with white lilies and a Pascal candle, signifying the purity of the sacrificial lamb. The priest is garbed in white vestments interwoven with golden thread, and Alleluias are sung by the choirs on

earth and the angels on high.

Prior to His ascension into Paradise, the Lord recognized that there would be loneliness and longing among His disciples. Therefore He promised that through divine intercession the Holy Spirit would come down and dwell within them to strengthen their resolve until their time would come to be reunited with Him. The third person of the Most Blessed Trinity was to be their comforter, counselor, and intercessor, flooding them with supernatural graces. They were replenished with the patience and hope of heaven, giving them an undying hunger and thirst to save souls.

On Pentecost, tongues of flame hovered over their heads, and they were filled with a sense of fearlessness and wisdom of the ages. Through this enlightenment, these ordinary men and women were fortified to do the extraordinary and take up the daunting task of evangelizing the entire globe. This great commission to spread the message of salvation to all peoples sent the followers of Christ journeying throughout the known world and preaching the Good News till their time came to be receiving their eternal reward. The majority of them suffered martyrdom as witnesses in imitation of their Master's sacrificial love.

The Paraclete, or Intercessor, as He is also known, is still ever-present in our lives as members of the Church. The Blessed Mother, the Bride of the Holy Spirit who was the

maternal presence in the Upper Room during Pentecost, also hastens to our aid and steadies our souls while we endure the trials of this fallen world and eagerly anticipate being perpetually enveloped within the omnipresence of the Triune God in the hereafter. Someday, when our mortal fast has been completed, we will be invited to His table and partake in the everlasting feast.

Christ has risen! Indeed He has risen! Alleluia!



Ramazan: The Intimate Season of Love

By Touseef Mohamad Khan

Love... a spring that has gushed its heart out, from the day it sprouted, in a manner both volatile as well as stable. So mystic in its nature and so evident in its expression that some were left with a bitter life and some with a beautiful death. So magical that once taken rushes in the veins with a speed more vigorously than it had discharged. Neither has its enchanting aura diminished despite being in the company time, its most fearsome adversary nor has its peaks been scaled despite being ventured by the most passionate.

Quenching with this overwhelming potion has never been for those who never listened to the moans of their parched hearts and thus justifiability they never deserved it. There has been a question, though, which has always engaged me as a spectator. Has God loved his creation more or has the creation been successful to surpass it as a reciprocal act? I have settled it with believing in the former, for there is no reason to rest my mind else-way.

God has never forsaken men but men did it with all possible means. He kept on devising ways to improve their lives but men kept on innovating customs to degrade it. He kept on formulating routes to bestow dignity upon them but men kept on making schemes to humiliate themselves. But God was not to be discouraged

or disgruntled for He knew that if the universe was to remember Him as the creator it had to be through men of sacrifice. Thus this endeavor led Him to craft such men who even after being subjected to unfathomable tribulations grew more magnificent and peerless and in the process defined and redefined the meaning of love.

God has never forsaken men but men did it with all possible means. He kept on devising ways to improve their lives but men kept on innovating customs to degrade it. He kept on formulating routes to bestow dignity upon them but men kept on making schemes to humiliate themselves. But God was not to be discouraged or disgruntled for He knew that if the universe was to remember Him as the creator it had to be through men of sacrifice. Thus this endeavor led Him to craft such men who even after being subjected to unfathomable tribulations grew more magnificent and peerless and in the process defined and redefined the meaning of love.

Long ago when the face of Islam radiated mercy and tranquility, long ago when Islam was another name of serenity and peace, long ago when Islam stood for knowledge and brotherhood, long ago when Islam was what it was and not what it was made into, some men rose above the rest to elevate themselves to feel the being of God –within them and beyond. Breaking the shackles of desire and need they set out on a journey

whose door lay embedded beneath their conscience just to find the universe of truth naked in front of them. Ripping apart their cloaks of necessities that pegged them to dust they overwhelmed their being with shrouds of eternity. Establishing the overpowering authority of their creator by attribution to virtues wasn't enough for them thus undertook voyages to feel Him within their own existence. For them, every fragment of the known and unknown had one meaning and in the dimensions of which they constantly realized themselves being found and being lost and then being found again. To have their fill from the goblet of the divine was least satisfying for their incarcerated selves for it wasn't their flesh and bones that required to be soaked but their souls that demanded no less than the very hand to quench their thirst that made them in the first instant. Nothing was to stop them and nothing ever did. Leaping from one pedestal of immolation to another plinth of attainment they incinerated themselves in kilns of immortality. The clay of life that structured their foundation, the water of sustenance that molded their arrangement, and all other elements of subsistence that crafted their pattern lay in front of them revealing their innermost secrets and in the most vibrant mannerism. The circles of calm and turbulence, tranquility and tumult, pleasure and hurt, darkness and light, life and death all rendered meaningless and subordinate. The process continued till the arrival of such a time that what remained of them was merely a

transparent component through which images of God flashed by. This endeavor of human love to reach the edges of eternal love was never easy as the same was done in the most adverse of circumstances. They were those who loved God according to how He wished them to do and not how their fallible minds told them. They never disconnected from the test and never disengaged from the effects of the test, the test of living in the world. And this is what is known as practical irfan, the purest form of traveling inwards to taste the divine nectar in the gardens of the beloved. For them, the most critical part remains to adhere to the decrees of God, the only means to sustain the unrivaled universe of love within them.

O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you—as it was for those before you—so perhaps you will become mindful 'of Allah'.
(Quran 2:183)

Ramazán does not mean to abstain from food. On a physical side it symbolizes restraining one's self from certain things which are deeply embedded in human life and the most basic of which is food. It is the crown jewel for the spiritual wayfarers. It has been reported from Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq while he tells his companion, *'O Jabir! Whoever during the month of Ramazan, fasts in its days, stands up for prayers in parts of the night, controls his desires and emotions, puts a rein on his tongue, keeps his eyes down, and does not injure the feelings*

of others, will become as free of sins as the day he was born'. Undoubtedly it has a deep impact upon the one who, for the sake of seeking nearness to his creator, embarks upon the journey. The impact is spiritual, mental as well as social and hunger has a profound connection with all three. We find in Suluk al Arifan a beautiful narration of the Prophet's heavenly journey (Me'raj):

“O'Ahmad! Do you comprehend the outcome of fasting? 'No.' Replied the Holy Prophet [pbuh]. 'The outcome of fasting is less eating and less talking.' Replied Allah, and then explained the outcome of silence and less speaking as follows:

'The result of silence is wisdom; the result of wisdom is enlightenment; the result of enlightenment is certainty; and when a person attains the Exalted spiritual position of certainty, then he does not care how he starts his day, whether with ease or hardship, and tragedy or comfort. Such is the state of those who have attained the position of content, and whoever attains this position acquires three inseparable characteristics: thanks (shukr) not contaminated with ignorance, invocation (zikr) not mixed with forgetfulness and love not mixed with the love of others.'

'Whoever loves Me in this manner does not intermingle the love of others with My friendship; I too love him and make others to love him; would make his heart's eyes opened, so that he could witness My splendor and majesty; would not deprive him of the knowledge and enlightenment bestowed by Me upon

others; amid night's darkness as well as during the brightness of the day would whisper and communicate with him, so that he becomes disgusted with other's company; would have him listen to My speech as well as the speech of My angels; My secrets which I keep hidden from others would become manifested upon him. Would saturate his wisdom with My enlightenment (ma'refat) and would sit Myself in place of his wisdom; would make the pang of death and its hardships easier for him so that he would enter Paradise with ease and comfort. When the angel of death would descend upon him would speak to him: Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! Allah is anxiously waiting for you. At this point Allah would speak to him: This is My Paradise, make yourself at home, and this is My neighborhood in which you would be dwelling forever.' Then the soul would say: 'O' my Lord! You have introduced Yourself to me and after identifying You I became detached from Your entire creation. By Your Splendor and Majesty, I swear that in order to earn Your pleasure if I have to be slaughtered seventy times with extreme suffering and torture, even then Your consent would have been the dearest and desirable thing for me.' At this point Allah would speak to him: 'I swear with My Splendor and Majesty that from now on there will never be any veil between Me and you, that you may see Me whenever you desire; that is the way I treat my friends.'

Ramazán, the season of love, rather holding within its immeasurable confines a spring that witnesses an enthralling blossom of hope for a lover that once he

opens his petals for the glorious rays of his beloved, it shall merge in its dazzle. A pristine summer that nourishes the fruit of his anticipation to be caressed by the one for whom he basks without hesitation. A golden autumn wherein the brimming soul decorates the palms of his true admirer. And a spectacular winter which blankets love with love.



The April Fool

By Fr. Jacob Boddicker, SJ

“Tear down this temple,” the April Fool cried,
“and on the third day shalt I raise it up.”

On an ass did he come, crowd-hailed, then hied
to a quiet place with his friends to sup.

“This bread is my Flesh; this wine is my Blood,”
yet to all ‘twas no change in look or taste.

Though claimed he divine, heeded not ill-brood
of one there, silver-swayed, who’d lay him waste.

The Fool who dared to trust, abandoned was
to mock and spit, blood and bone, agony,
then though innocent bore he his own cross
‘fore enthroned a sad lord on Calvary.

“The jester king!” laughed they, those people cruel;
but on day three proved they the April fools.



Unlock the Sealed Heart

By Zainab Mamaluba

Our hearts are a beautiful blessing from Allah, and we must do everything we can to keep them healthy. Just as we should take care of our health and diet in order to avoid heart disease, we should also take care of our spiritual side. We are beings with a body and a soul. We must strike a balance and care for both aspects of our existence.

What is the sealed heart?

We must not allow our hearts to remain sealed and veiled for the rest of our lives. We must realize that a sealed heart is one that is diseased. This is a heart full of hostility, hypocrisy, animosity, arrogance, and disbelief; it is a heart that is forgetful of Allah's commands; it is a heart that loves showing off and is a habitual sinner in private and God-fearing in public; it is a heart that has forgotten the remembrance of Allah; it is a heart that is truly preoccupied with worldly desires; it is a hypocritical heart; it is a heart that always follows unlawful desires and allows them to overtake their reasoning; it is a heart that beats ill towards other people; it is a heart that feels sad and broken when it sees other people's happiness and excellence in life.

This is the sealed heart that only perceives the negative aspects of life.

We should learn from this verse that we should not wait for Allah to seal our hearts, because those who have sealed their hearts will meet a tormenting punishment. Spiritual heart disease is worse than any other sickness since it requires our sincerity to fully treat and cleanse our hearts.

How can we heal our hearts that have been sealed?

By performing more good deeds and making innumerable du'as, one might dispel the darkness that has engulfed the heart. We must hold ourselves more accountable for our misdeeds by assessing our behavior. Are we abiding by the commandments of Allah or committing sins constantly? If we are conscious of our sins, we must hasten to seek forgiveness and repentance from Allah. I know it won't be simple, and it will take more time and practice, but we must take the first steps to ultimately remove the seal from our hearts. Try to involve ourselves in the remembrance of Allah and do greater obeisance to Allah in solitude. Spend some quality time with Allah. We must confess our faults and humble ourselves before Allah. Lastly, we must constantly keep the hereafter in mind. If we keep in mind that our activities will be assessed in the hereafter, we will be reminded to do good things sincerely. I know we are frail

beings prone to errors, but we have the power of reasoning to steer us on the right path.

It is still possible to be forgiven. This month of Ramadhan is the finest time to ask forgiveness and repent for whatever we have done, whether in private or in public. Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. Never give up hope on that. May Allah make it easier for all of us to provide us with this chance to begin a God-fearing life. In Shaa Allah, may Allah unseal all the sealed hearts and instill in them the fear and love that beats only for Allah.



Pursuing Jesus

By Hannah Skipper

Recently, I had an interesting Easter themed dream. It started with Jesus and His disciples walking down a dusty dirt road in the Sahara Desert and, as they go along, Jesus tells them He wants to wash their feet. Then the conversation runs almost verbatim John 13:8-10.

Peter: No, you will never wash my feet.

Jesus: Unless I wash you, you'll have no part in me.

Peter: Then not just my feet but my hands and head as well.

Jesus: Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet. And you are clean, though not every one of you.

Then, suddenly, Jesus transforms into a marten and the twelve disciples become one greyhound. The dog takes off after the marten and I'm so surprised that I wake up.

Of course, my first waking thought was to be weirded out that my brain turned Jesus into a weasel but a few days later, at my weekly Bible study, we got into a conversation about night dreams and my pastor, who was teaching the class, gave me a cool insight.

He said that my turning the disciples into a greyhound made him think of how excited a dog is when it chases its prey. Likewise, we should pursue Christ with the intense drive that the greyhound in my dream started off after the marten.

To be completely honest, I'm not always the best when it comes to "washing feet" but if I always pursued Christ with the same vigor that the greyhound pursued Him, I might be better at it.



Mahtab in the Month of Sha'ban (from "The Life and Times of Mahtab Shirazi, 1.8")

By Kawther Rahmani

Timeframe: Pre-Ramadhan, 1432.

Location: California

“O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed upon you as it was prescribed for those that were before you so that you may be God-conscious.”

- The Holy Qur'an, 2:183

“And be not like those who forget God, so He caused them to forget their own souls.”

- The Holy Qur'an, 59:19

“Imagine a bird that possesses the ability to fly but can not because a heavy stone is fastened to its leg. The bird's inner nature wants to fly, but the weight of the stone does not allow it. If this stone is not removed the bird eventually does not even attempt to fly because it has lost all hope. After some time, the bird totally forgets its desire to fly. Similarly, Allah created us with the desire to fly spiritually and reach divine goals, but the heaviness of the body's desires and material needs weighs us down. The month of Ramadan is a time to release our [chained] legs from the stones of sins and worldly lusts, and begin the spiritual journey.”

- Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi

Note: Unlike the Western calendar, the Islamic calendar is lunar, and months begin when the first crescent of a new moon is sighted. Pious believers are encouraged to fast for three consecutive months in *Rajab*, *Sha'ban* and *Ramadan* and connect all three as one. *Rajab* (رَجَب) is the seventh month of the Islamic calendar. It means “respected,” “regarded,” and “admired.” Its name derives from the classical Arabic verb “*rajaba*” meaning “to respect,” or “to be in awe or fear of.” *Rajab* is said to be like a river in heaven which is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey. It is considered to be God’s month. *Sha'ban* (شَعْبَانَ) is the eighth month of the Islamic calendar. It is called the month of “separation” because the pre-Islamic Arabs used to disperse in search of water. It precedes the month of Ramadan. *Sha'ban* is known as “The Prophet’s Month,” and is a month of mercy and pleasure. *Ramadan* (رَمَضَانَ) is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is known as the month of the ummah, or the month belonging to the people of the Islamic community. The word *Ramadan* is from the Classical Arabic verb “*ramida*” (رَمِضَ) meaning “to become intensely hot, burning, scorching, blazing or glowing.” It is said that one burns off one’s sins through fasting during the month of Ramadan

We meet our main character, Mahtab, after her birth month

of Rajab has passed and the month of Sha'ban is in full swing, just preceding the month of Ramadan, in which fasting is obligatory on all able-bodied adult males and females

And so we begin.

Even though Mahtab Shirazi was attempting to fast for the millionth time, she was not an expert faster, and even though she started fasting, or should we say, started trying to fast, at age nine, she was now twenty, and things had become harder rather than easier. She had suddenly entered the so-called Land of No that her mosque friends constantly talked about, and having no expectations but burgeoning, hidden excuses when her personal responsibilities in life and religion became increasingly heavier and heavier, her health became weaker, which, in turn, led to a progressively increasing abhorrence of fasting. So, despite the fact that her successes made her more confident, as the time between them increased, her confidence in her fasting abilities drastically diminished, and even though she was told repeatedly that she was a woman now, she wasn't exactly allowed to do anything, which is ultimately what led her to be so immature - although Mahtab herself, whose name meant the moonlight of a full moon, would have called it, simply, unhappiness.

Mahtab was sure she was a bad Muslimah with a one-way ticket to hell. Her baby sister Setareh, who liked to

be called Starr, was being groomed to be a perfect superstar in everything sacred and mundane on God's holy green earth, it seemed - and they had all seemed to have forgotten: She was the first Virgo! And, no fair! - because, by that time her parents had learned to parent, she was surer than ever of her eventual and untimely fate, even though her parents had never specifically puritanically banished her there. It just seemed a more suitable place to reside given her somewhat rebellious tendencies. Her four older brothers, meanwhile, had all moved out and were pursuing various endeavors in different cities around the world. Now it was just Maman, Baba, Mahtab and Starr.

Although she could be considered a failure in many things since reaching the internally longed-for and dreaded state of affairs called baligh which is alternately sublime - oh yay, I'm a woman! - and disturbing - oh wait! no yay, fasting and prayer is required now! - she could not be considered a failure in attempting to try many things. And she tried hard not to try to do too many haram things. In fact, she was able to miraculously avoid the reprehensibly haram things her American mother and Persian grandmother had warned her about avoiding at all costs. But for some reason, it was the halal and wajib that she had trouble with, not the haram. Just her kind of luck.

Okay, so Mah-e Rajab was a wreck. Forget about it. Let's not even talk about it.

So, it started on a Saturday. The First of Sha'ban. 2011. 1432. Someone invited her out to dinner, then canceled and made it lunch. Then they were no longer eating out, but eating-in, and her friend, who she wasn't particularly close to, was a good cook. She, of course, could not refuse. When was the last time she had good home cooking if it wasn't her own? She would have to find another day to practice fasting, before the even longer summer days of this year's Mah-e Ramazan commenced. She had plenty of time now.

Then somehow it was Friday. The weekly ladies lunch after Friday prayers. She always loved the food. How could she fast on a Friday? She couldn't fast then, she thought. So she ate some dates after the early morning *suhoor* ended, planning to eat later at the mosque. Then she got a phone call at 10 am saying the sheikh had to go out of town unexpectedly and *jumu'ah* was canceled, so everyone decided to fast and pray at home. Everyone had been told last night. Everyone, that is, except her. Even her mother knew, but she was so busy with Starr she forgot to tell her. She was so depressed she couldn't fast the entire weekend.

On Monday, she had an early morning doctor's appointment at the local university hospital. Of course, with all the trouble it took to wake up for that appointment at 6:00 AM and get out of bed roughly 45 minutes later, she obviously couldn't wake up for *namaz-e fajr* in its proper time. It was too early and didn't match

up with her schedule. (She made up her prayer before she walked out the door, though.) And of course, she could not pass by the coffee cart outside the hospital's doors before she went in. But then she remembered that she had to fast before her impending exam. So she made a mental note to herself that she would come back to this coffee cart, come-what-may, and order a tall hazelnut-vanilla-almond-honey latte with nonfat milk and a warmed-up chocolate croissant, which hopefully they wouldn't burn to a crisp like last time. She just needed a little something after the stress of going to the doctor. And, she wouldn't eat for the rest of the day, she promised.

"Food is my life!" She exclaimed later at home, when she was trying to fake fast for the rest of the day, although she never seemed to be so obsessed with food as when she was fasting.

"Not for long, sister."

"Is that a threat, Setareh?"

"Mah-e Ramazan is coming. And it's *Mah-e Sha'ban* now. You need to learn discipline and self-control now when you're young, otherwise it'll be too hard when you're older."

"What are you, my brother?"

"No, I'm your sister."

Ugh, the logic of a seven-year-old. She changed the subject. “Do you just parrot what you learn?”

“Isn’t that what I’m supposed to do?”

“How come you never show this side of you to Maman and Baba?”

“Because. It’s more fun to do it with you.”

“Anyway...Is it haram to watch The Food Network while fasting?”

“*Yessssssss*,” Starr answered like it was the dumbest question in the world.

“But I don’t covet...I just watch. It calms me down.”

“It doesn’t matter. You’re still attached to food. It’s not good, I think.”

“Oh, who asked you anyway?”

“You!”

“Well, it’s halal, right?”

“Why do you care? Nerd.”

“You’re a nerd.”

“I know. That’s why I get straight A’s...”

“Well, you grow up and see how hard life is to always get an A! So, don’t get so used to it, okay?”

“You’re just mad because you don’t win any fights!”

“Aaaaaggh! I hate you! Go away!”

“I can’t help it. I’m a Virgo.”

“I’m the first Virgo! Me!”

“Why are you fighting with a seven-year-old?”

“Good question.”

She had wished that they could then both walk into their respective bedrooms with huffs, puffs, exaggerated indignation and an explosive anger that would make them both slam their doors at the same time. Except for the fact that they didn’t have separate rooms, they were forced by the economic decisions of their parents to share a room - and even though all four brothers had moved out, all of their rooms were re-purposed somehow - thus forcing Mahtab to crawl up a ladder and throw herself on her bunk bed before she could slam *anything* except herself. And by then, she was too angry to care. Or even move.

Grrr.

“I don’t want to fast! I don’t want *Mah-e Ramazan* to come! I wish *Mah-e Sha’ban* wasn’t here. I missed all of *Mah-e Rajab*. I hate being Muslim! I’m such a failure. I mean, why does it have to be so hard?” she yelled into her muffled pillow.

Eventually, Starr came into their room and threw herself on her bed below Mahtab. It didn’t take long before Starr yelled to her parents who she gave what seemed like about five seconds relief from after they both came in the door at the same time after a long day at work. “Maman. Baba. Mahtab is losing it. And she’s shaking my bed with all her carrying on.”

“Mahtab! Get out here, please.” And just as soon as she had thrown herself on the bed, she was now stumbling down the ladder and throwing herself from her room all the way to the couch.

“I’m here,” she said, dejected and looking glum.

“Okay, what is this I’m hearing you don’t want *Mah-e Ramazan* to come?”

“Listen, *Mahtab jan*, you tried. You have to at least try. If you can’t do it, then just say *astaghfirullah* and try to do a little better next time,” her father said.

“Agha Reza, don’t encourage her to be lazy.”

“But Maman, if I attempt to fast and I fail, then I’ll lose confidence in myself. Then I won’t be able to fast at all.” She couldn’t believe she had actually said it out loud.

“Listen, Mahtab. I think you need to re-evaluate what these holidays mean to you. You’ve clearly forgotten. They should mean more to you than fear of headaches or hunger or thirst when you’re suddenly and unexpectedly or unavoidably sad...I mean, if something really terrible is going on and you absolutely can’t fast, don’t feel guilty. Allah knows your intentions.”

Mahtab started crying. “But...”

“But what?”

“How do you even know how I feel when I didn’t even tell you?”

“Because I have eyes in the back of my head. And I’m your mother. Now are you going to listen to me or what?”

“Grrrr, okayyyyyy.”

“What did you say, Madam?”

“Urrr, nothingggggg...Maman.”

“Okay, first of all, stop whining.”

“I’m nottttt!!!!”

“You are, and I’m not going to argue with you. Okay. Now. You have two choices! One: You either call your brother in Iran and tell him what you’ve been up to...”

“Oh God, no! Maman, no! No wayyyyyyyyy! I don’t want to hear another one of his sermons about backsliding! I’m not backsliding...I’m just...”

Suzie looked at her daughter with a raised eyebrow. “Yes?”

“I could listen to one of his friends give a sermon on backsliding... They’re not as mean or condescending or out of touch with reality as him...”

Suzie ignored Mahtab and kept going, deciding her daughter’s badly hidden girlish crushes on her son’s roommates at the seminary would NOT be entertained.

...Or...”

“Or, whattt...OMG, mom! Whatttt?” She broke out into a sweat. “OMG, OMG, OMG, what could be worse than number one?”

“Listen, your brother Hadi treats you like that because you’re his kid sister. You know, he only talks to you like that.”

“Oh, really? You haven’t seen his notebooks. You just wait.”

Silence.

“I already know about that. I’m talking to him, little by little. I know his teachers wouldn’t allow that.”

“Why? I mean, they talk about backsliding too...”

“Not in those tones, Mahtab, and not with that holier-than-thou attitude. He’s not just there to learn. He’s there to refine himself. And you’re here to refine yourself...that is, until you get to where you need to be going...but you’ll still be refining your soul until the very end, inshallah, if I can help it.”

“Okay...hmmm...ho hum...next option. Please, Maman. Be kind.”

“I’m always kind.”

“You are?”

“What?”

“Nothing. Next option, Maman joon.” She put on her sweetest smile.

“Two.”

“Aghhhhh, Oh my Godddd! What now?”

“Two: You go to your room and read a book, and you stay in there until you return to your senses.”

“What book? Any book of my choosing?”

“Yes.”

And, being her father’s daughter, she chose the easiest option.

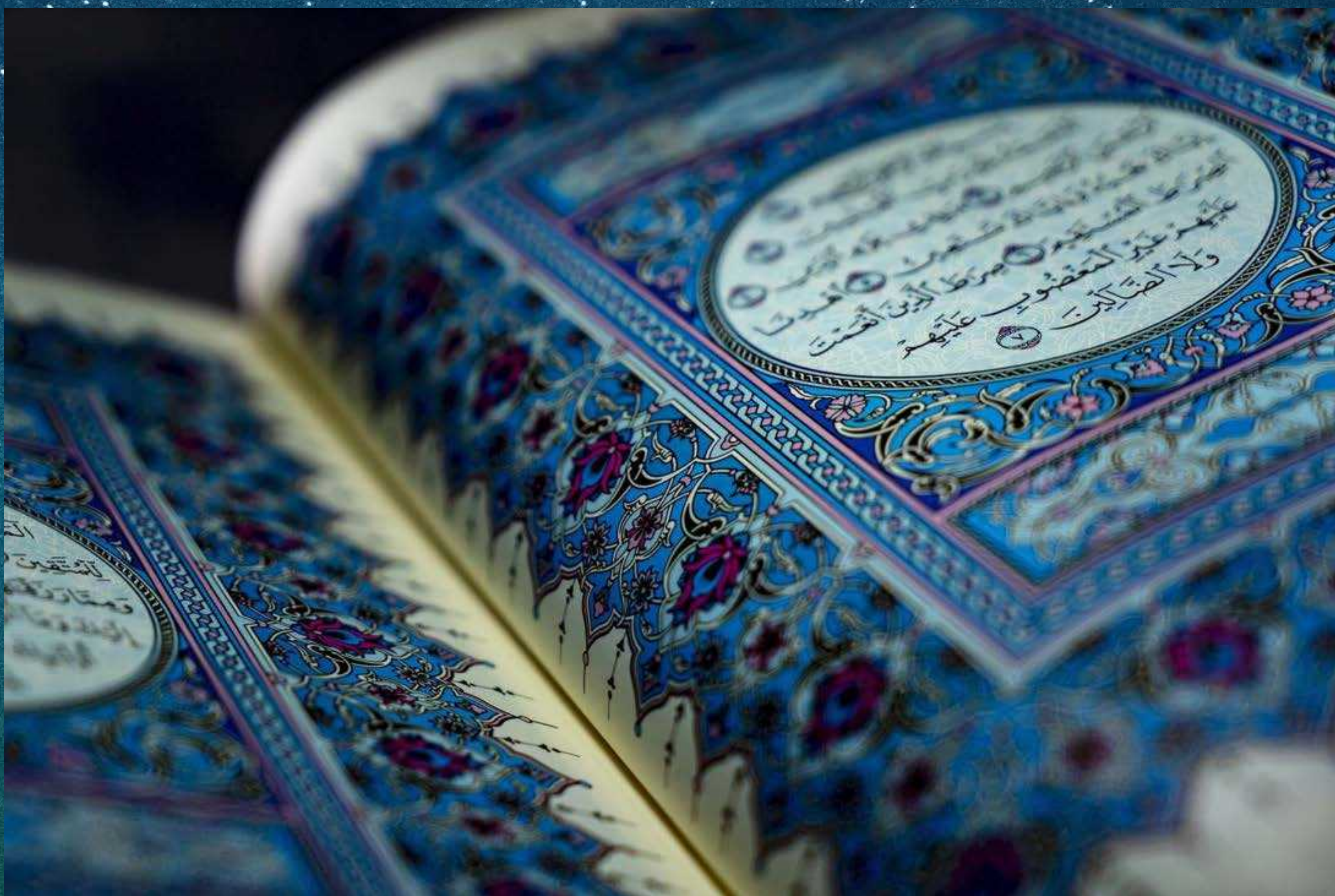
Mahtab ran to her room, opened up a random book she had forgotten about on the floor and found a prayer she had written out on a scrap of paper being used both as a bookmark and to also remind her to actually say it regularly, except she forgot, like usual. She couldn’t remember why she had written it out, only that she felt compelled to, and it had soothed her soul immensely. She had confidently told herself that she would read it on a regular basis, then tucked it in a book and forgot about it. She read it now and hoped it would help like it helped her mother. And if it did, and anybody asked her, she would say Baba told her to read it.

Bibi Fatima's du'a for morning and evening:

“O You! The Ever-Living, The Eternal One! By Your mercy, I ask for your help!

So, help me and do not let me be deceived by myself for even the blink of an eye,
and repair all my affairs!”

- *Muhaj al-Da'awat*, p. 141-142



Resurrection Reality

By Luis Dizon

Recently, I listened to an interview with a United Church of Christ minister named Dwight Welch, who asserted that Christians need not believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead. He claimed that what really mattered was not whether Jesus' resurrection took place as a matter of fact, but that Christians lived according to the moral teachings taught by Christ. This claim created some pushback, with Catholic apologist and podcaster Trent Horn getting into a dialogue with him and arguing that, if one can be a Christian without believing that Jesus was raised from the dead, then the whole notion of "Christianity" becomes meaningless.[1]

This idea that the Resurrection of Jesus is optional to the Christian faith is a totally new concept, and would have been foreign to the early Christians. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, asserts that if Christ had not been raised, then there is no point to anything he has taught, and they have all been wasting their time. He writes:

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ . . . if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:14-15, 17-19). [2]

This being the case, Christianity stands or falls on the Resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is a false religion that is worthy of nobody's time and must be abandoned. On the other hand, if Jesus did rise from the dead, then the Christian faith is vindicated as the truth, over against every other competing religious and metaphysical claim.

But what does it mean for Christ to be raised? How can we know this to be true? And what does all this mean for us? In order to answer this, we must first find out where the concept of Resurrection comes from, then we can examine the historical evidence for Jesus' Resurrection, and finally we can reflect on why this is important for Christians.

Resurrection Origins

Belief in the Resurrection of the body has its origins in Judaism. We see this idea referenced in passing in a few places in the Old Testament. We see Job obliquely referring to it when he says, "*after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another*" (Job 19:26-27). Likewise, in the book of Daniel we read about the Resurrection in these terms: "*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*" (Daniel 12:2). Finally, in 2 Maccabees, the seven brothers

who are martyred by Antiochus IV give voice to their hope that though they will be killed, they will be raised again. As one brother puts it: *“One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him”* (2 Maccabees 7:14).

Contrast this with the Greco-Roman worldview where Resurrection of the body was a totally alien concept. We see this in Acts 17:19, where the Athenians call Paul a “babbling” for preaching Christ and the Resurrection (Gk. *Anastasis*). They didn’t even understand what he meant by “Resurrection”, and thought that he was referring to a goddess named “Anastasis.” [3] The reason for this incomprehensibility was that they had a low view of the body, and believed that one’s goal was to be freed of it, not return to a new one. As Kirk MacGregor explains:

"The notion of death by crucifixion and bodily resurrection were abhorrent to ancient pagans, who linked crucifixion with insurrection against the Roman state. Ancient pagans also often viewed the body as the prison of the soul that was to be destroyed at death, such that the soul could be permanently liberated from the body to enjoy a purely ethereal existence." [4]

Thus, belief in Resurrection has thoroughly Jewish roots, and has no precedent in ancient Paganism, which held that the body is a prison that we must seek to be freed from. Yet belief in a Resurrection in this age is not totally

consonant with ancient Judaism either, for although the Jews believe in a Resurrection of the body, they believe that this would occur at the end of time. Thus, when Jesus told Martha that Lazarus would rise again, she didn't realize what he meant, and replied, "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day*" (John 11:24). For Jesus to be raised in this age was to take the existing Jewish concept in a totally new direction.

Thus, the Resurrection of Jesus, although it is more Jewish than Pagan in its origins, ultimately goes beyond both categories. As N.T. Wright explains, "the world of second-Temple Judaism supplied the concept of resurrection, but the striking and consistent Christian mutations within Jewish resurrection belief rule out any possibility that the belief could have generated spontaneously from within its Jewish context." [5]

Five Basic Facts

But how do we know that Jesus was raised from the dead. Much ink has been spilt discussing the historicity of the Resurrection, but space does not permit us to explore the topic comprehensively here. [6] However, because we live in an age when so many are skeptical of the Resurrection, it is necessary to say a few words. Perhaps one of the most popular methods of verifying the historicity of the Resurrection comes from Gary Habermas and Michael Licona. In *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, they posit

the “Minimal Facts Approach.” In this approach, they refer to five historical facts held by the majority of scholars and historians, Christian or non-Christian.[7] These five facts are the following:

1) *Jesus' death by Crucifixion.* Bart Ehrman, in his work on the historical Jesus, references the Crucifixion as one of the certain facts about Jesus life, stating, “Jesus was a Jewish man, known to be a preacher and teacher, who was crucified (a Roman form of execution) in Jerusalem during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea.”[8] Aside from the four Gospels, the Crucifixion is also referenced by secular historians Josephus[9] and Tacitus[10], showing that this was common knowledge among those who were aware of Jesus.

2) *The disciples' claim to have seen the risen Jesus.* Paul recounts the following tradition regarding the postmortem appearances to the disciples:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (1 Corinthians 5:3-7)

Many commentators, noting Paul's use of tradition language, suggest that This passage is citing a pre-Pauline creed.[11] If so, this means traditions about the disciples seeing Jesus alive after his crucifixion started very early on, too early for legendary development to set in.

Some skeptics suggest that these appearances are due to hallucinations. The problem with this explanation is that many of the appearances are in group settings. As Habermas notes elsewhere, one cannot get a group of people to experience the same hallucination, as it is a very individual experience.[12] For a group of people to see the same thing, they must have seen something (or someone) real and tangible.

3) *The conversion of Paul.* In the above quoted tradition where Paul recounts the postmortem appearances, he adds his own name to the list of people who have seen the risen Jesus: "*Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me*" (1 Corinthians 15:8). His testimony to seeing the risen Jesus must be mentioned in its own category because unlike the most of the other disciples, he was a bitter opponent of Christianity. He had no reason to hallucinate or falsify an appearance of Jesus unless such an experience really happened.

4) *The conversion of James, the brother of Jesus.* Similar to Paul, James was not among the disciples of Jesus before

the Resurrection. In fact, he was a skeptic, and thought Jesus was crazy during his public ministry (e.g. Mark 3:21). For him to become not only a disciple, but a prominent leader of the early church, could only be explained if the tradition Paul recounts of James seeing the risen Jesus points to a real experience.

5) *The empty tomb*. Perhaps the most contentious of the five facts is the empty tomb. Habermas and Licona point to three factors that support the tomb being empty:[13]

First, the fact that preaching of the Resurrection began in Jerusalem, near where Jesus was buried. If Jesus' tomb was still full, his opponents could have pointed out this fact, and squelched the rise of Christianity immediately.

Second, enemy attestation from that time period assumes the empty tomb. Our earliest recorded explanation for the disappearance of Jesus' body was that the disciples stole it (Matthew 28:11-15). By making up this excuse, Jesus' opponents implicitly concede that the tomb is indeed empty.

Finally, all four Gospels report that women were the first witnesses to the empty tomb. Given the low view of women's testimony in the ancient world, the Gospel writers could not have invented this narrative. Instead, they must be reporting an accurate report of what really happened when the women went to visit the tomb.

Thus, we have the five basic facts on which the historical case for the Resurrection is based. Wright, commenting on both the postmortem appearances and the empty tomb, states: "I conclude that the historian, of whatever persuasion, has no option but to affirm both the empty tomb and the 'meetings' with Jesus as 'historical events'... they took place as real events; they were significant events; they are, in the normal sense required by historians, provable events; historians can and should write about them." [14]

Put together, these facts create a strong cumulative case for the Resurrection, which alternative hypotheses are not able to account for. As Wright explains in his book, the emergence of the Christian belief in Jesus' Resurrection would be incomprehensible without them:

"We are left with the conclusion that the combination of empty tomb and appearances of the living Jesus forms a set of circumstances which is itself both necessary and sufficient for the rise of early Christian belief. Without these phenomena, we cannot explain why this belief came into existence, and took the shape it did. With them, we can explain it exactly and precisely." [15]

Because He Lives

Going back to the initial discussion, the reason why

Resurrection so important for Christian faith is because it forms the basis for the Christian hope that death is not the end, and that there is a future where the dead will be raised. Jesus' Resurrection signifies not only that his work on the cross is efficacious for the forgiveness of sins, but it also assures us that one day, we will also be raised. As Jesus put it, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). Likewise, Paul expresses the Resurrection hope, saying: *"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"* (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

This also means that all the deeds we've done, whether for good or evil, have consequences not just in this life, but will bear fruit in eternity. This is the main flaw in the assertion that one can have a purely moral Christianity without the Resurrection. Jesus himself said connects our actions in this life with our future Resurrection, when he says, *"for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."* (John 5:28-29)

For those who have faith in Christ and have repented of sin, we have confidence that we will ultimately triumph over death, just as Christ did nearly two-thousand years ago. Thus, we conclude with the words of Paul in 1

Corinthians 15:54-55, who triumphantly declares the victory over death for all who believe in Christ:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?

Notes:

[1] Trent Horn and Dwight Welch, “DIALOGUE: Do Christians need to believe in the Resurrection?,” The Counsel of Trent (podcast), May 9, 2019, <https://www.podcastrepublic.net/podcast/1354647807>.

[2] All Scripture quotes are from the ESV-CE.

[3] Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Luke–Acts (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 10 (Zondervan, 2007), 981.

[4] Kirk R. MacGregor, “Christianity, Overview of Early,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Lexham Press, 2016).

[5] Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 686.

[6] Since lack of space prevents a thorough exploration, here are a few works I recommend, some of which are cited in this article: N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003); Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Kregel Publications, 2004); Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (IVP Academic, 2010);

Josh and Sean McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (HarperCollins, 2017); Matthew Levering, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?: Historical and Theological Reflections* (Oxford University Press, 2019); Andrew Loke, *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A New Transdisciplinary Approach* (Routledge, 2020); and Dale Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

[7] Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 43-80.

[8] Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (HarperOne, 2013)

[9] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.5. For a discussion of the authenticity of this quote, see Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 60ff.

[10] Tacitus, *Annals*, 20.44.

[11] E.g. Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC (InterVarsity Press, 1985), 201; and Richard Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, ANTC (Abingdon Press, 1998), 198. For a recent study of this topic, see James Ware, “The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3–5,” *New Testament Studies* 60.4 (October 2014), 475-498.

[12] Gary Habermas, “Explaining Away Jesus’ Resurrection: the Recent Revival of Hallucination Theories,” *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations* 2001, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/107.

[13] Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 71-74.

[14] Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 709.

[15] *Ibid.*, 696.

Mother of Her Father

By Adeel Ahmed



Fatima watched her father bury his head in his hands as he sat in his tent. She had seen him put on a brave face in front of all the men, for they relied on him for strength. It was his message they followed, and if Muhammad Ibn Abdullah faltered, then so would the entire Ummah. But alone with his child, he let his shoulders slump forward. Fatima felt some small comfort that her father was able to show this vulnerable part of himself to her, even if he dared not reveal it to the world. Her mother, Khadijah, was the only other person he allowed to see him in such a state.

But now Khadijah lay in their tent, struggling with fever and shortness of breath, and Fatima realised the steep price of her father's prophethood. The Mushrikeen of Mecca had banished them from the city and then isolated them in the desert, preventing supplies from reaching them through an embargo. They claimed that if Muhammad was truly a prophet of the one God, then he and his new followers would survive this test. Fatima initially had not felt the intensity of hunger others

experienced, for she had always eaten little anyway. But her mother's health had taken a turn for the worst from malnutrition.

Fatima had always been told she was growing up quickly, but she had not expected that her mother might be taken from her so very soon. She thought she would be married with children by the time the sad day came. Yet now, watching her mother in such a weakened condition, tears came to her eyes. Her father approached her, and his eyes softened. He took her in his arms, and she could feel how his body trembled. "Oh, my Fatima, you are a part of me," he whispered. "Whatever pleases you, pleases me, and whatever wounds you, wounds me."

"Pray for a miracle, my father," Fatima pleaded. "You are Allah's final messenger. Surely, He will cure Mother if you make supplication."

"Fatima, your mother's love for us has been nurtured by Allah Himself. Yet even I am not immune from death. It will come for all created things."

Fatima closed her eyes tight, imagining the pagan nobles in Mecca, living in the lap of luxury while the Muslims starved. "What wrong did you ever commit, my father?" she rasped. "You preached the message that was given to you from Jibreel. How can telling the truth be treated as crime?"

“A person is tried in proportion to their faith,” her father replied. “First the Prophets, then the righteous, then those most like them. And Khadijah was the first to believe in me...” He kissed his daughter's head. “I will pray that Allah’s will may be done.”

Then he turned and went inside the tent. Fatima pressed her ear against the flap, listening carefully at the words spoken within.

“Habibti, are you truly fasting? Now? In your condition?” the prophet chastened his wife.

“I am simply doing as you have preached, my husband,” replied Khadija. “I would rather face Allah with my soul cleansed than with a full belly.”

“I have always taught moderation in all things. There is no shame in a sick woman taking whatever nourishment she can.”

“A dying woman, O Muhammad, not a sick woman,” stated Khadija. “I know it as well as you do. Save what food remains for yourself and dear Fatima.”

“Khadijah, as your husband, I implore you to eat.”

“And as you have preached, a wife can refuse her husband's request if it goes against God’s will,” she reminded him.

“You know what I desire brings me closer to our almighty.

It is Ramadan, the holiest of months. Shaitan is chained up right now, and despite the sorry conditions of our people, the heavens have opened their light. It is fitting for me to spend my last days in fasting and prayer, out of gratitude to Allah that I had the privilege of being the wife of the final messenger.”

Silence elapsed for several moments. Then he murmured, “When Jibreel came to me in the Cave of Hira, it thought that I was going mad. When I ran out, it was as though I could see his true form covering the skies themselves. But you proved to me that it was not some djinn or demon. You brought me to Waraqah to confirm this visitation and prophethood. You supported me when no one else would. You were my first pupil. Your loss can never be filled in this dunya!”

Yet I am older than you,” she said stoically. “You surely guessed that might mean you might become a widower. You were mocked for marrying a woman much older than you. Do you know why I married you? I may have been older, but with my wealth, I could have married a man of higher status, but when I met you, and talked to you. When you worked for me, I swear I could feel your purity, your greatness. Your destiny is greater than mine and will continue to unfold when I am in my grave.”

“What about Fatima?”

“She will support you, as the mother of her father,” replied

Khadija. “Tell her to come inside. Then you can recite Quran for us both. It will be doubly blessed, as it will be straight from the mouth of the rasool Allah himself.”

And so Muhammad bade Fatima to enter. Husband and wife both marvelled at their daughter’s beauty, especially her eyes. They spoke of how they emanate an untapped wisdom waiting to be forged from the rough within her, and she blushed.

Then the messenger of God began to recite: “In the name of Allah, the most beneficent and merciful. All praises to Allah, the most completely merciful, the source of mercy. All praises to Allah, lord of worlds, the sole lord of the day of reckoning. It is You we worship, and You whom we ask for help.”

The last words struck Fatima the hardest, aware that her faith was truly being put to the test through her own helplessness. She leaned her head against her mother’s shoulder and listened to her father’s chanting until she fell asleep on her mother's shoulder, dreaming of better days to come.

Fatima watched as the Muslims placed Khadijah’s wrapped body into the earth. Fatima began to breathe in and out in heavy breathes, tears streaming down her face.

That isn't my mother. It's just a shell. And yet...it feels like they are putting me in the ground along with it.

She could not move; she could not speak. The dirt kept piling up on top of the corpse. She wanted to leave before she broke down entirely, convulsing in sobs.

Yet before she could do so, a servant held her tight.

“Mistress, you have to remain strong,” the Bedouin woman whispered in her ear.

Yes, you are the daughter of the messenger,” said an Ethiopian woman beside her. She had once been a slave, but was given her freedom by Muhammad after she embraced Islam. “You know your place, deep down inside. You must be a lioness!”

“Lo!” the Bedouin woman nudged the Ethiopian woman in the side. “And here comes the lion!”

She pointed at a man with a white beard and two swords strapped on his back who was approaching them. It was Hamza, the uncle and bodyguard of Muhammad.

“I will take care of things from here,” sighed Hamza, gesturing for her to step aside with him as the servants saluted him.

When they were alone, the old man brushed the tears from her cheeks. “I know you have been dealt a wound from which you may never fully heal, young one. Yet what can we expect of these times of oppression? Only Jannah exists without suffering. Until then, the righteous must endure the dunya.”

“But she was the prophets wife...”

“Prophets are sent for the good of the people, not for their own benefit, nor to gain special favors for their loved ones.”

Her lip quivered. “Without my mother, I have only my father. If he is to die too, then inshallah I will follow him soon after.”

“Everyone has their own allotted time here to be tested and purified,” he told her. “Allah alone knows when your soul will be called forth, child. Until then, you must fulfil your role here. No one else can do that for you.”

“But what can I hope to do?”

“What would your mother have you do?” insisted Hamza.

“She would tell me to be a comfort to my father.”

He smiled. “Khadijah was always very wise.” Then he knelt down, putting his hands on her shoulders. “This is just the beginning. Remember that, Fatima. We will not always live under whims of those that hate us, nor even rely on the charity of the Abyssinian Christians, Allah bless them. One day we Muslims will be ready to fight for ourselves. Your father and I are already preparing. Where there is darkness now, we will rise with the dawn, and our enemies will have cause to tremble.”

Muhammed walked back to the camp with silent dignity, his clothes covered with the blood and guts of a camel that had been hurled at him by angry townspeople when he tried to preach his message. He could not help but be thankful Hamza and Ali had not been with him. His uncle and cousin were usually measured, but lately he noticed rage was easily kindled within their hearts when it came to threats of his person. But he wanted to avoid bloodshed if possible. He would much rather see the people convert.

He recalled the old woman who used to throw garbage at him every morning as he walked by her house. He could not bring himself to hate her, however. When the routine of barrage of rubbish did not occur for several days, he went to visit her, and found her in bed with a fever. He barely uttered a word but set about doing whatever needed doing around the house. She was so astonished that she broke down crying. She begged his forgiveness and ultimately took the shahada before passing away.

There wasn't evil in her heart. She was simply afraid of change. No matter what she had done to him, Allah brought her to Islam. There was no special wrath hidden for her, in spite of her previous behavior; instead, she had been rewarded by Allah with the gift of enlightenment. He wanted the same for the people who chased him out of town. He could easily imagine a scenario where their hearts would open as well. No, his anger was saved for the

ones that tortured believers in a degenerate manner, or those who incited attacks against his followers, like some poets had recently done with their inflammatory verses. He felt responsible and bore the pain of all those who risked their lives by embracing his message. The ummah was like a body, after all; when one part was dealt a blow, all the parts ached.

That was why he was here, seeking safe haven for his fledgling community among the tribes. So far none had taken them in. Begging was much harder than having camel guts thrown at him, for it struck at the pride deeply embedded into the heart of every Arab. Yet Islam called every man to put aside his personal prestige for a higher cause. And so Muhammad begged.

In the past, he had sought advice from his uncle Abu Talib, for he was a chieftain, skilled in the matter of politics and negotiation. After all, Muhammad had been raised in his household after the death of his parents, and he loved and trusted him like a father. Yet Abu Talib was gone now, and unlike the old woman, he had died still clinging to the old gods of his ancestors. That wounded Muhammad the worst. He wished the old man could have understood that his earlier ancestors, Ibrahim and Ismail, had submitted themselves to the One God who breathed life into the clay of the first man, Adam. No matter how much Muhammad wanted to rationalize his uncle's diehard polytheism, he knew that he likely resided in hellfire now, and that reality broke his heart, especially knowing the goodness he had

been capable of in life.

Muhammad found a stream to bathe in, then cleaning his clothes as best as he could before anyone could see their soiled state. After his ablutions, he prayed his salaah on the bank. Then he rose, straightened his shoulders, and headed for his tent. He was determined not to burden his daughter any more than necessary. She had already lost a mother, and he wanted her to know she could rely on him. She had not been the same since Khadijah's passing, talking only when necessary, barely eating what little food they were able to obtain, and refusing to interact with the other children. He certainly sympathised with his daughter, and there was a part of him that wanted to retreat into the shadow of his own grief as well. But Allah had tasked him with a duty, and there was no turning away from that.

As soon as he opened the flap of the tent, the aroma of fresh bread and meat welcomed him. Fatima stood in front of him with a tray of food.

"Ramadan mubarak, my father," she greeted him, her beautiful eyes dancing.

"Ramadan mubarak, my daughter," he replied, gazing at the tray.

"I made an iftar meal to break our fast," she stated with a touch of innocent pride. "The women of the camp were happy to assist me."

“Where did you get all this?” he queried in surprise.

“Hamza managed to bring down an antelope,” she told him.

“For once, Hamza was hunting venison instead of lions?” he chuckled. “It must have been a dull pursuit for him.”

“Oh, he will find a way to make it sound exciting, I am sure,” Fatima insisted, and he saw her smile for the first time in weeks. “But the better story is of this bread, which was a gift by some farmers, newly converted to Islam. You see, Father? People are listening to your message and more will follow.”

Now Muhammad smiled and kissed her forehead. “She lives on through you, Fatima, and in your words of comfort and this meal you have made. They are a salve to my soul.”

Fatima set down the tray and embraced her father. “I will be your shield as she once was to you,” she assured, tears filling her eyes. “No matter what tests we are sent, I will be by your side.”

“Truly your light is from Allah,” he whispered, holding her tight, “and your status will be higher than the heaven and the earth.”

Lilies on the Altar

By Amanda Pizzolatto

With tender care the lilies are arranged
Set on either side of the candlestick's flame
A splash of white against the setting sun
Accenting the altar in a flowery frame

The sun's warm glow slowly fades
As below the horizon it dips lower and lower
And the shadows lengthen and grow
As night lays down a blanket of dark cover

The night grows darker and darker
The sounds in the night seem to jeer
With taunting accusations of loneliness
Creating a tense and scary atmosphere

Yet the lilies stand tall and firm
And the unwavering flames continue to burn
Ignoring the discord that never sleeps
Knowing that soon it will be their turn

When the night seems to be at its darkest
Does light flood the room and church bells ring
Announcing the defeat of evil and the Resurrection
The gates of Heaven open to our Lord and King

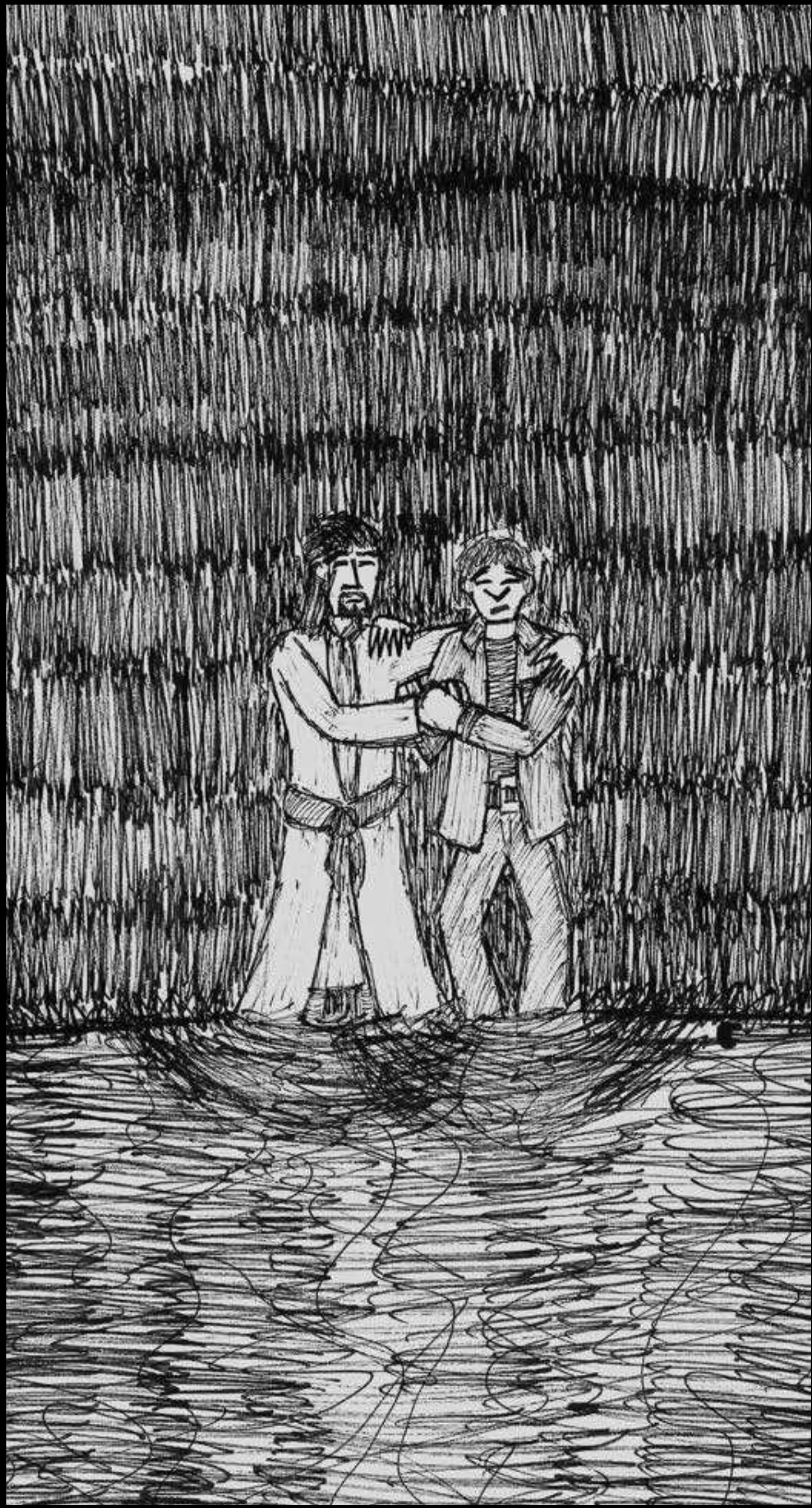
Hallelujah, hallelujah our Savior has beaten death
He has retaken control of the night
He has cleared the path and opened the gates
As angels sing of His glory and might

The sun peeks its head over the horizon
And its blazing rays chase the shadows away
The lilies and the candles are still standing
And a cave where a body no longer lays





"Matthew 27:3-10" by G. Connor Salter



"When You Pass Through the Waters" by G. Connor Salter



"Christ Brings Freedom" by G. Connor Salter



"Easter Egg Drawing" by David Glenn



Easter in Maryland
By The Traveling Troubadour



Views from the Holy Land

By David Hamburger

