



In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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Property as an Idol

Lessons from human-caused disasters

The 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is the largest in US history, surpassing the Exxon Valdez disaster. Oil is of great interest to the public as today's economies are driven by the plentiful availability of energy. The country will be affected by its large social and environmental impact. The BP spill and the earlier Exxon spill are both human-caused disasters. It appears that the greed for profits played a significant role in both cases. Safety measures were overlooked in the interests of saving money (by already large and wealthy corporations).

Some of these factors related to greed are recurring themes in recent memory. The financial industry crisis of 2007-2010, and the automotive industry problems during roughly the same period in the USA ring a bell. If we dig deeper, we can find a variety of other "human-fueled crises". Many problems faced by mankind today are created in some part by failings such as greed, dishonesty, arrogance, and trying to take advantage of the weak. One could summarize these human failings in simpler terms: setting up material wealth as a god besides God (Quran 18:32-46).

Property as an Idol

*[18:32-33] Cite for them the example of two men: we gave one of them two gardens of grapes, surrounded by date palms, and placed other crops between them. Both gardens produced their crops on time, and generously, for we caused a river to run through them. ... [18:35] When he entered his garden, he wronged his soul by saying, "I do not think that this will ever end. ... [18:42] Indeed, his crops were wiped out, and he ended up sorrowful, lamenting what he had spent on it in vain, as his property lay barren. He finally said, "I wish I never set up my property as a god beside my Lord." ... [18:45-46] Cite for them the example of this life as water that we send down from the sky to produce plants of the earth, then they turn into hay that is blown away by the wind. **GOD** is able to do all things. Money and children are the joys of this life, but the righteous works provide an eternal recompense from your Lord, and a far better hope.*

Similar passages are found in the Bible (1 Tim 6:10; Col 3:5; Luke 12:29-31).

[1 Timothy 6:10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the

faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

[Colossians 3:5] Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

On the subject of oil, Quran 34:12-13 mentions the first oil field. Fittingly, we are told about appreciation in the same context (34:13). Appreciation grows our souls rather than our wallets. A submitter puts the body in the service of the soul, rather than the other way around. This is also the message in Luke 12:29-31.

The First Oil Field

[34:12] To Solomon we committed the wind at his disposal, traveling one month coming and one month going. And we caused a spring of oil to gush out for him. ... [34:13] They made for him anything he wanted—niches, statues, deep pools, and heavy cooking pots. O family of David, work (righteousness) to show your appreciation. Only a few of My servants are appreciative.

It's not the money in itself that's bad. It is

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

the idolization, the greed, and the consequent violation of God's laws that gets people into trouble. In the example in 18:32-46, money caused the individual to grow arrogant. To think they were somehow "special and immune to trouble". To forget about God and growing the soul. To fail to see that money was like anything else fleeting from this world. This pattern of human failing is shown elsewhere in the Quran (74:15; 28:76-83).

[74:11-15] Let Me deal with one I created as an individual. I provided him with lots of money. And children to behold. I made everything easy for him. Yet, he is greedy for more.

We can contrast the example of Qaroon (28:76-82) with Solomon. God was first in Solomon's mind, and not money. This is illustrated in his dealing with the queen of Sheba (27:36). Similarly, the "rich believer" in 16:75 does not idolize the money, and instead uses it in God's way.

As the Quran tells us, the problem is not restricted to greed alone. Once money becomes the idol, people do everything they can to appease their god and grow closer to their 'god' by hoarding. They may backbite and slander others to get ahead.

[104:1-2] Woe to every backbiter, slanderer. He hoards money and counts it.

Other consequences of this idolization of property include: lying, passing the blame, taking advantage of weaker groups, and not giving a fair share. For example, I previously thought the Exxon spill was simply caused by a drunken boat captain. Wikipedia now displays articles showing the crew was overworked and fatigued. The ship's anti-collision radar system was broken and deliberately left unrepaired for a year to save money.

While only God knows the full truth, clearly not everyone's accounts of the event agree. So there are lies involved. People prefer to pass the blame in these situations. Humans want to save their

own skin and look good in the eyes of the world. God's system is complete honesty (4:135; 5:8; 6:152). Submitters do not seek exaltation of themselves on earth (28:83).

You Shall Not Bear False Witness

*[4:135] O you who believe, you shall be absolutely equitable, and observe **GOD**, when you serve as witnesses, even against yourselves, or your parents, or your relatives. Whether the accused is rich or poor, **GOD** takes care of both. Therefore, do not be biased by your personal wishes. If you deviate or disregard (this commandment), then **GOD** is fully Cognizant of everything you do.*

Submitters are told to fear God, not the people or their perceptions of us. Making a mistake is bad enough, but lying about it or accusing someone else is a bigger mistake (4:112). Two wrongs don't cancel each other out. Instead, it encourages passing blame and lack of personal responsibility. Satan started this trend (15:39) way back before Creation, and it continues in this life (4:78-79; 68:28-32) and through the Day of Judgment (14:22; 64:9). The correct response would be to seek God's forgiveness and own up to one's mistakes (4:78-79, 110-112).

Nothing Bad Comes From God

*[4:79] Anything good that happens to you is from **GOD**, and anything bad that happens to you is from you. We have sent you as a messenger to the people, and **GOD** suffices as witness.*

*[4:110-112] Anyone who commits evil, or wrongs his soul, then implores **GOD** for forgiveness, will find **GOD** Forgiving, Most Merciful. Anyone who earns a sin, earns it to the detriment of his own soul. **GOD** is Omniscient, Most Wise. Anyone who earns a sin, then accuses an innocent person thereof, has committed a blasphemy and a gross offense.*

Taking advantage of weaker groups is another problem related to idolizing money. The "little guy" is often the one who suffers. Small investors were more likely to lose their homes and not be able to afford retirement due to the financial crisis. In the oil industry disasters, rig workers and the small-time fisher folk were among those

who paid with their lives and incomes, while the executives continue to make money. We notice human greed often takes advantage of the weak.

The Quran deliberately enjoins us against the temptation of taking advantage of the weak (2:275; 4:2; 6:152; 16:92; 89:15-24). This is partly why, the debtor dictates the terms to the scribe when writing down financial transactions (2:282).

Another problem related to setting money as a god besides God is cheating. God strongly condemns cheating and corruption (4:29; 11:85; 83:1-6) and tells us to be aware of what we send ahead for our souls (59:18).

*[6:152] You shall not touch the orphans' money except in the most righteous manner, until they reach maturity. You shall give full weight and a full measure when you trade, equitably. We do not burden any soul beyond its means. You shall be absolutely just when you bear witness, even against your relatives. You shall fulfill your covenant with **GOD**. These are His commandments to you, that you may take heed.*

[89:17-20] Wrong! It is you who brought it on yourselves by not regarding the orphan. And not advocating charity towards the poor. And consuming the inheritance of helpless orphans. And loving the money too much.

The human response to the oil crisis will probably result in lengthy laws and a mountain of documentation. All of it is for one specific area of legislation in one tiny aspect of life. A life that is fleeting and miniscule. Compare this to the one book God tells us to read for the eternal life, the Quran (12:111). Which, if followed would lead to life being easier, simpler and more meaningful.

Quran 30:40-46 tells us about the disasters that have spread through the land and sea because of the mistakes we humans made. 30:40 reminds us not to fall into idolatry (e.g., idolizing wealth or

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

property). God is the only one worthy of worship. The commercial gains we harvest should be put in service of God, and be a source of continuous appreciation. Business should not distract us from God (24:36-38). We should force ourselves to observe the commandments, even if it means giving up on trade or the vanities of this world (62:9; 18:28).

Who Is Worthy of Worship?

[30:40] **GOD** is the One who created you. He is the One who provides for you. He is the One who puts you to death. He is the One who resurrects you. Can any of your idols do any of these things? Be He glorified. He is much too exalted to have any partners. Disasters have spread throughout the land and sea, because of what the people have committed. He thus lets them taste the consequences of some of their works, that they may return (to the right works).

[24:36-37] (God's guidance is found) in houses exalted by **GOD**, for His name is commemorated therein. Glorifying Him therein, day and night—People who are not distracted by business or trade from commemorating GOD; they observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), and they are conscious of the day when the minds and the eyes will be horrified.

We conclude with David and Solomon's example of devotion to God and not this world (27:15-19).

[27:15-19] We endowed David and Solomon with knowledge, and they said, "Praise **GOD** for blessing us more than many of His believing servants." Solomon was David's heir. He said, "O people, we have been endowed with understanding the language of the birds, and all kinds of things have been bestowed upon us. This is indeed a real blessing." Mobilized in the service of Solomon were his obedient soldiers of jinns and humans, as well as the birds; all at his disposal. When they approached the valley of the ants, one ant said, "O you ants, go into your homes, lest you get crushed by Solomon and his soldiers, without perceiving." He smiled and

laughed at her statement, and said, "My Lord, direct me to be appreciative of the blessings You have bestowed upon me and my parents, and to do the righteous works that please You. Admit me by Your mercy into the company of Your righteous servants."

Faiz

References

- 1 "Deepwater Horizon oil spill", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepwater_Horizon_oil_spill
- 2 "Exxon Valdez oil spill", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exxon_Valdez_oil_spill#Identified_causes

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Ramadan: A Month to Reflect

Ramadan (also spelled as ramadhan, ramazan, so on) is a very special month for Muslims. It is the lunar month during which the Quran was revealed, providing guidance for the people, clear teachings, and the statute book. God decreed us to fast during this month to express our appreciation (2:183, 185).

Why pray or fast?

The religious practices instituted by God, such as fasting in Ramadan, are not ordeals but rather great opportunities for us to develop our souls. They are blessings from God. If we can practice our religious duties the way we are supposed to, we get many benefits. Furthermore, these practices allow us to be more conscious of God in our lives.

Some people surmise that God should not need any of our prayers and appreciation of His blessings. They think that God has ego and needs to satisfy Himself through our worship. But that is an absolutely blasphemous attitude. In fact, they are the ones who have big egos. God makes it clear that He does not need any of our worship or any of us, but He is pleased for us if we make the right choice and decide to be appreciative (39:7). Therefore, if we are appreciative, it is for our own good (31:12).

Above and beyond nourishing our soul, the real self, fasting also has numerous, scientifically proven benefits for our physical health and the mental well-being of our

body. The time, length and nature of the fast all contribute to its overall positive effect. Fasting gives our digestive system a rest and improves our physical health.

When is Ramadan 2010?

In order to determine the beginning and ending of a lunar month in Islamic calendar, the first thing we need to know is the definition of a day. The Islamic day is the same as the Hebrew day. It begins at sunset and ends at the next sunset. In this system, the night comes before the day.

We also need to know the new moon times to be used for determining the beginning and ending of the lunar month. The Muslims during the time of Prophet Muhammad did not have the technological advantage we have today. They needed to see the crescent moon before they started fasting. God tells us that He rendered the sun and the moon as calculation devices (6:96, 10:5, 17:12, 55:5).

We have the technology to determine precisely when the different phases of the moon will appear for any given month, now or in the future, according to the design of God. So we don't need physical sighting of the moon to decide when the month of Ramadan will start or end.

Therefore the new moon times to be used for determining the beginning and ending of Ramadan are given below in UT (Universal Time) or also known as GMT (Greenwich Mean Time).

August 10, 2010: 3:08am (UT)

September 8, 2010: 10:30am (UT)

The actual time for each time zone is relative to UT. In order to calculate the Ramadan start date, compare the time of the New Moon with the Sunset in your location. If the new moon is before sunset, you should fast the next day, God willing.

Similarly, to determine the last day of fasting, compare the time of the next New Moon with the sunset in your location. If the new moon is before sunset, the month of Ramadan is complete on that day. Otherwise one needs to fast the next day.

Therefore, God willing the first day of Ramadan is August 11, 2010, and the last day of Ramadan is September 8, 2010 for most parts of the world.

The Night of Destiny (Night of Power) will be, God willing, on September 5, 2010.

Please check your local sunset times to

(Continued on page 4)

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(Continued from page 3)

verify these dates. For example, the last day of fasting is, God willing, September 9 for Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand etc. as the new moon will likely be after sunset in these locations. Also, some very northwestern states in North America and Canada may start fasting on August 10, depending on the sunset in those locations.

Happy, peaceful and blessed Ramadan to all, God willing.

[2:184] *Specific days (are designated for fasting); if one is ill or traveling, an equal number of other days may be substituted. Those who can fast, but with great difficulty, may substitute feeding one poor person for each day of breaking the fast. If one volunteers (more righteous works), it is better. But fasting is the best for you, if you only knew.*

* * * * *

The Night of Destiny

The Most Illuminating Night

The literal meaning of the Quranic word “*Saum*” for fasting is “*to stop, to keep quiet, to be at rest*” and it implies abstinence. While fasting, one has to stop certain normal and standard acts which, though permitted are categorized as carnal and sensual demands of the living body—eating and drinking and indulging in lawful sex. The word “*Ramadan*” is derived from the word “*Ramz*” which means “*to burn or to*

scorch” and here it applies to “*the burning of selfish desires.*”

Fasting places everybody—the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak—on the same platform. It is not meant for self torture. Although it is stricter than other fasts, it also provides alleviations for special circumstances. It is not merely a temporary self rejection from food and drink but this abstention enables our attention to be directed to loftier ideals.

Fasting accustoms us to face the hardships of life—by renouncing everyday comfort; we give strength to our resolve and increase the power of resistance. Obviously, the purpose of fasting is to keep men and women away from such demands of life which humans share with animals. It is a month-long exercise to “*counteract the effects of the poison of sensuality.*”

Fasting is a strict form of religious rite—we abstain from food from dawn to sunset not because we are unable to “afford” the luxury of eating and drinking but because we want to obey Almighty God’s command. It is a month of self-discipline—full of blessings for humankind. It was on this illuminating Night that Prophet Muhammad received his call and the Quran was revealed to him.

[44:3] *We have sent it down in a blessed night, for we are to warn.*

Sura (Chapter) 97 perfectly reflects the significance and majesty of this blessed night.

[97:1-5] *We revealed it in the Night of Destiny. How awesome is the Night of Destiny! The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by their Lord's leave, to carry out every command. Peaceful it is until the advent of the dawn.*

It was revealed in portions during a span of 23 years. Every time, the human required help and guidance, God in His Benevolence sent us an urgent “*e-mail.*”

[17:106] *A Quran that we have released slowly, in order for you to read it to the people over a long period, although we sent it down all at once.*

This Night first witnessed the glow of the luminosity which was destined to illuminate the whole world with the advent of the Final Revelation. It is clearly indicated that God has blessed humankind with the brightest, most immaculate radiance of knowledge and enlightenment to wipe away all darkness, ignorance and degradation.

Alim C.