

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



June 07, 2016

## The Social Aspects of Ramadan

The month of Ramadan is going to start and the Muslims around the world will be observing fast. Practice of fasting in month of Ramadan is basically abstaining from any sort of food or drinks from the 'Morning Azan' to the other one in the evening. Although most of the people consider fasting as a way of gaining virtue and guaranteeing better record to be able to secure a better place in the world hereafter, at the same time, it has certain social implications. Fasting is not only abstaining food and water for the entire day; it enables its observers to bring about positive changes in their social life. The most important teachings of Ramadan is tolerance. Tolerance is not only positive in an individual's life but also for his social deeds. It supports in maintaining improved social contacts and, simultaneously, revitalizing social relations. Possessing tolerance is the most desirable attribute to have as it supports build the society, which largely depends on collaboration and trust. Ill-advisedly, today the followers of religion are seen as the most intolerant people around the world. However, Islam has always stressed on the quality of tolerance.

Tolerance towards others is vital as today's world is turning to be more multicultural. Muslims are in different parts of the world and there are many Muslim countries that have different religious groups residing in them; thus, Muslims need to show great tolerance and respect for them and fasting is one of the ways of practicing tolerance. Staying devoid of food and water throughout the day and keeping oneself normal and agreeable in unison requires a great deal of tolerance. Additionally, it is one of the necessities in fasting that a person must not get too much coarse in his social dealings and must never turn bad tempered. Turning angry and abusive easily are the reasons that spoils a person's fast and are not allowed at all.

In a similar fashion, the attribute of self-control can also be learned through fasting, and that can play a significant role in bringing positive changes within a society. The people who are able to control themselves are able to change the society, while fasting is one of the ways of experiencing self-control. As there are certain things that a person has to abstain from during the month of Ramadan, this teaches him to control his self. This self-control can afterwards be used in changing the society for better.

It can be observed easily within our society that mostly people go with the tide of the time and changes in the society. They go wherever the social changes take them and they do not have any control over themselves and the society. They seem like puppets that have their strings in the hand of time and the society. However, this is not the concept of the responsible being in Islam. Islam wants a Muslim to be responsible and socially active. If he is not able to understand and control himself and the society, he is not the best of the creatures and does not deserve to justify his own existence.

Realizing the vices and evils in the society and abstaining himself from them is the first step that a person can take in the way to virtue and betterment of society. Being in fast, people are not allowed to be part of the vices and crimes in the society and must play a positive and assertive role to shun those vices and crimes, otherwise he does not deserve to observe fast.

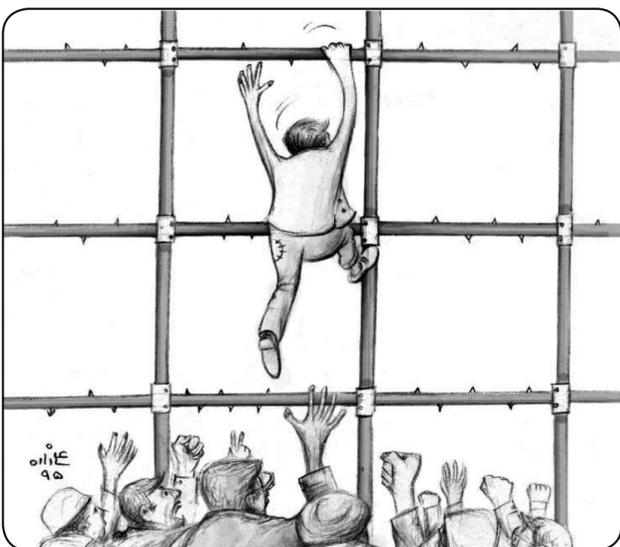
Another important social aspect of Ramadan is to feel the hunger and realize that there are many people who have to remain hungry in our society not just for one month but for the entire year or may be their entire lives. Therefore, fasting must not only make them realize this fact but also take steps to reduce their sufferings.

Unfortunately, the above said qualities are not seen frequently during the month of Ramadan. It can be observed in Muslim societies during the month of Ramadan that people are less tolerant in their social interactions. They get angry on pity matters and even become abusive on minor incidents. They seem to lack self-control and do not learn what fasting has to teach them. They are not able to abstain from the evil and vices and in fact become a part of them and strengthen them.

A simple example of trying to earn extra profit from the business dealings can be cited in this regard. The businessmen and shopkeeper, though observe fast, are not able to avoid the attempts of earning more and more money in every possible way. They increase in the prices of the items they sell without taking into consideration the regulations of the state law or the negative impacts this increase may have on the lives of other people, especially those who suffer from destitution.

In addition, during the month of Ramadan, instead of feeling that the class disparity is negative and evil, it is further strengthened. The poor can hardly get food to break their eternal fast, while the rich have different types of dishes on their tables while breaking their fast.

In short, fasting is not just to earn virtues; it has certain social aspects as well, which should be learned through the process of fasting. If it is not able to make its observer an active and responsible member of society, there is no need of keeping oneself hungry and thirsty the whole day.



## Unmitigated Militancy Scapegoats Civilians

By Hujjatullah Zia

Taliban, the inveterate ideologues, will continue violence and bloodshed in Afghanistan and target civilians to put pressure on the government. The appointment of Mullah Haibatullah as Mansoor's successor does not seem to be a game-changer in political arena and peace process. To consolidate his authority, Haibatullah will follow the path of his predecessor. Most likely, he is orchestrating attacks against Afghan government and runs the gamut of insurgency so as to carry out Omari Operation. Saddened by Mansoor's death, he must have taken the oath of revenge.

Manosoor's death was believed to pave the grounds for peace process, since he was deemed an "obstacle" before the talks. However, this dream does not seem to come true. The recent insurgency is a slap not only in the face of talks but also in the face of the burgeoning democracy in Afghanistan. People's rights to life, liberty and estate are still at stake and they will be discriminated against on the grounds of their accidental backgrounds by religious extremists - mainly the Taliban and the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

With the escalation of the Taliban's annual offensive, Afghan civilians will bear the brunt of it. For instance, a large number of non-combatants, including women and children, were killed last year in the spring offensive. Similarly, Omari Operation is conducive to the increase of civilian mortality. As a result, insurgents have reportedly stopped several vehicles in Kunduz province on Tuesday morning and abducted a number of travelers - from which a dozen was later found dead. Subsequently, Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani pointed finger at Haibatullah and said that the untoward incident put his religious knowledge under question - as homicide and indiscriminate killings are against Islamic tenets. Warring parties, mainly the Taliban, have violated humanitarian law a thousand and one times in the country. They showed no iota of mercy to women, children and wounded in action despite being emphasized by sacred doctrines and international law. In other words, radical ideologues, who are born and bred in hotbed of radicalism such as seminaries, have always had an iconoclastic movement and turned a deaf ear to the call of their conscience, societal values, and public beliefs. To put it succinctly, their acts of inhumanity are not only denounced by international instruments but every sound mind rebukes their indiscriminate killings which take place frequently.

After all, the insurgents also seek to kill people on the grounds of their ethnic differences and create mistrust among the nation. The civil and historical unrests also colored the public with the brush of ethnicity and caused a gap among Afghan brethren.

The Taliban, during its regime, supported the idea of ethnicity and murdered people on the grounds of their caste, creed and color. However, this mindset still holds strong sway among the radicals. Therefore, they stoke sectarian violence so as to sow the seed of discord among the multi-ethnic nation. It is believed that warring parties seek to muddy the water through fueling sectarianism and then side with a certain group under the term of their tribal identity. Moreover, these acts of terror will galvanize people to stage protest against the government and widen the gap between state and nation - as targeting civilians had always been a means of putting pressure on the state.

The acts of targeting civilians on the basis of their ethnicity will arouse a sense of mistrust between state and nation but will not cause a rift among the ethnic groups. Fortunately, the public has grown mature politically and understands that ethnic or tribal conflicts will push the country towards further instability.

Spilling the blood of non-combatants will stigmatize the Taliban in national and international arena and put their humanity under question - while their ideology is already notorious. Sacrificing locals' life for self-interests, which is in direct conflict with religious values, ethical code and international law, has been depicted in the strongest possible terms, the militants, however, continue callously. Hence, it is believed that the Taliban guerillas are mercenary pawns rather than religious ideologues. They are paid to carry out the road-map of political figures who are masterminding behind the scene.

Most likely, the ISIL group, who is married to more radical ideology, is also engaged in stoking sectarianism. But it should be noted that a number of the Taliban members also disguised themselves as ISIL after the death of their reclusive leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, which led to splinter group. ISIL seeks to fragment the nation and widen the range of their violence in any possible ways. As soon as ISIL gains firm foothold in Afghanistan, civilian casualties will mount more than ever before. Warring factions intend to undermine the authority of National Unity Government (NUG) through murdering civilians and show no green light about peace. If this trend continues unabated, it will create mistrust between state and nation. Therefore, it is the government to intensify its military action to prevent such untoward incidents. Moreover, if Afghanistan cannot eliminate the terrorists' hubs, located across the border, at least the porous borders should be tightened to bar from their infiltration and let not the previous episodes, such as Kunduz takeover, be repeated. The state is hoped to put an end to civilian mortalities and abduction in near future.

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## The Overselling of Financial Transaction Taxes

By Kenneth Rogoff

However November's presidential election in the United States turns out, one proposal that will likely live on is the introduction of a financial transaction tax (FTT). While by no means a crazy idea, an FTT is hardly the panacea that its hard-left advocates hold it out to be. It is certainly a poor substitute for deeper tax reform aimed at making the system simpler, more transparent, and more progressive.

As American society ages and domestic inequality worsens, and assuming that interest rates on the national debt eventually rise, taxes will need to go up, urgently on the wealthy but some day on the middle class. There is no magic wand, and the politically expedient idea of a "Robin Hood" tax on trading is being badly oversold.

True, a number of advanced countries already use FTTs of one sort or another. The United Kingdom has had a "stamp tax" on stock sales for centuries, and the US had one from 1914 to 1964. The European Union has a controversial plan on the drawing boards that would tax a much broader array of transactions.

The presidential campaign of US Senator Bernie Sanders, which dominates the intellectual debate in the Democratic Party, has argued for a broad-based tax covering stocks, bonds, and derivatives (which include a vast array of more complex instruments such as options and swaps). The claim is that such a tax will help repress the forces that led to the financial crisis, raise a surreal amount of revenue to pay for progressive causes, and barely impact middle-class taxpayers. So far, Hillary Clinton, the likely Democratic nominee, has embraced a narrower version that would target mainly high-speed traders, who account for a large percentage of all stock transactions, and whose contribution to social welfare is open to question. Clinton, however, may well shift closer to Sanders's position over time, as she has on other issues. Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, has not yet articulated a coherent position on the topic, but his views often come down remarkably close to those of Sanders. The idea of taxing financial transactions dates back to John Maynard Keynes in the 1930s and was taken up by Yale professor and Nobel laureate James Tobin (who, incidentally, was my undergraduate professor) in the 1970s. The idea, in Tobin's words, was to "throw sand in the wheels" of financial markets to slow them down and make them hew more closely to economic fundamentals.

Unfortunately, this rationale has not held up particularly well either in theory or in practice. Particularly misguided is the idea that FTTs would have significantly muted the buildup to the 2008 financial crisis. Centuries of experience with financial crises, in-

cluding in countries with FTTs, strongly suggests otherwise.

What is really needed is better regulation of financial markets. The unwieldy and deeply imperfect 2010 Dodd Frank legislation, with its thousands of pages of provisions, is a stopgap measure; few serious people view it as a long-term solution. A far better idea is to force financial firms to issue much more equity (stock), as Stanford University's Anat Admati has proposed.

The more banks are forced to evaluate risks based on shareholder losses rather than government bailouts, the safer the system will be. (On this score, Boston University professor Laurence Kotlikoff's more radical ideas for taking leverage out of the financial system merit serious attention, even if his own quixotic presidential campaign otherwise goes unnoticed.) The fundamental problem with FTTs is that they are distortionary; for example, by driving down stock prices, they make raising capital more expensive for firms. In the long run, this lowers labor productivity and wage levels. True, all taxes are distorting, and the government has to raise money somehow. Yet economists view FTTs as particularly troublesome because they distort intermediate activity, which amplifies their effects. A modest tax that is narrowly targeted, like the UK's, does not seem to cause much harm; but the revenue is modest.

To get more revenue requires casting the net much wider. For this reason, the Sanders plan covers derivative instruments that would circumvent the FTT (for example, by allowing people to trade income streams on assets without trading ownership). But extending the tax to derivatives is a messy business, because their complexities make it difficult to define precisely what should be taxed. And as the impact of the tax expands, it becomes hard to know what the ultimate effects on the real economy will be.

It is certainly difficult to determine whether the outside revenue estimates of the Sanders campaign could be realized; many studies suggest otherwise. The claim is that the US can collect more than five times the amount the UK collects on its narrow tax - an amount equal to more than 10% of revenue from personal income tax. The problem is that trading will likely collapse in many areas, and many financial trades will be executed in other countries. If economic growth is affected, eventually other tax revenues will fall, and if government bonds are covered, borrowing costs will rise.

The US desperately needs comprehensive tax reform, ideally a progressive tax on consumption. In any case, a properly designed FTT can be no more than a small part of a much larger strategy, whether for reforming the tax system or for regulating financial markets. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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