

## Nineteenth Rule

# **ABSTAINING FROM TASTY FOOD**

We need to learn to be content with what The Almighty gives us as sustenance and never demand more. Food should be consumed with the intention of sustaining life and energy. Of course, one can always enjoy but we should never forget Allah (SWT). By forgetting Him and His presence, we would overeat, talk nonsense while eating, and not thank The One who brought us food in the first place.

Scholars who have reached these higher stages of Spiritual Perfection have strongly advised us to keep away from the pleasures of this world, even though many of them have been permitted by Allah (SWT). This is because refusing something you like is a great blow to one's Nafs, Soul and Desire and it is one way to tame one's desires and bring them under control, instead of the opposite.

Once, Amirul Mu'mineen, Ali, son of Abu Talib peace be upon him, was offered a sweet dish called *Khubais* (mixture of dates, raisins and ghee), but he refused to eat it. They said, "Do you consider it forbidden?" He said,

No, but I fear that my heart may become so desirous of it, that I am forced to come out in its quest.

As defined, *Zuhd* is the absence of desire and the *Zahid* is someone who is not fond of such mundane things as food and drink, dress and housing, other objects of appetite and pleasure, property and status, good name, proximity to rulers and influence, and every other thing that would depart from him at the time of death. This absence of love for mundane matters is because of neither incapacity nor ignorance about them, nor for any purpose or reward. Someone who has this quality is a *Zahid* in the above-mentioned sense.

However, a real *Zahid* is one whose *Zuhd*, as described, is not accompanied even with the hope of deliverance from the chastisement of Hell or the reward of Paradise, but solely for the sake of restraining his soul after knowing the benefits and consequences of each of these things mentioned. His *Zuhd* is habitual and is without any trace of greed, hope or expectation, worldly or otherworldly. This quality becomes habitual by means of restraining the soul from seeking pleasures, and by making it accustomed to austerities so that indifference to desire becomes firmly established in it.

In one of the anecdotes of the ascetics, it is related that there was a man who had been selling the stew of sheep's head and paludah (a sweet beverage made of starch jelly) for thirty years without ever tasting any of them. Asked the reason for this austerity, he replied,

When my soul desired these two things, I told it that it would never get any of them if it were to touch any of them. I did that so that it would not incline towards any pleasure whatsoever.

It is reported that his reverence, Shaykh Rajab Ali never cared for delicious meals. Most often, he used such simple foods as potatoes and puddings. At the tablecloth, he would kneel down facing The Qiblah and kind of bending over the food. Sometimes he would also hold up the plate in his hands while eating. He would always eat with full appetite. Sometimes he would put some of his food in the plate of a friend that he could reach out (as a sign of respect). While eating, he would not talk, and the others would keep silent out of respect for him. If someone invited him to a feast, he would accept or reject it with some deliberation. Nevertheless, he would most often accept his friends' invitations.

A similar incident with al-Khumeini (AR) when he asked for a watermelon and his followers brought him a very nice and tasty watermelon. It is reported that al-Khumeini (AR) refused to partake such a watermelon because it was so red and delicious. He – *may Allah fill his grave and the graves of all believers with flowers and fragrances from Paradise* - said that *he would prefer to have full control over his desires; and that if he partakes of the fruit, he will have lost control over his desires.*