*FASTING*

QUR’AN



"Ramadan is the (month) in which the Quran was sent down, as a guide to mankind and a clear guidance and judgment (so that mankind will distinguish from right and wrong)." (Q 2:183)

Oh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you many learn piety and righteousness" (Q 2:183)

Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain taqwaa." (Q2:183)



(Fasting is for) a fixed number of days. If any of you is so ill that he cannot fast, or on a journey, he must fast the same number of other days. But for those who can no longer manage to fast, there is a redemption (penance) by feeding a person in destitution (for each day missed, or giving him the same amount in money). Yet better it is for him who volunteers greater good (by either giving more, or fasting in case of recovery), and that you should fast (when you are able to) is better for you, if you but knew (the worth of fasting).(Q 2:184)

HADITH

The Messenger of Allah (saw) addressed his companions on the last day of Sha`ban, saying, "Oh people! A great month has come over you; a blessed month; a month in which is a night better than a thousand months; month in which Allah has made it compulsory upon you to fast by day, and voluntary to pray by night. Whoever draws nearer (to Allah) by performing any of the (optional) good deeds in (this month) shall receive the same reward as performing an obligatory deed at any other time, and whoever discharges an obligatory deed in (this month) shall receive the reward of performing seventy obligations at any other time. It is the month of patience, and the reward of patience is Heaven. It is the month of charity, and a month in which a believer's sustenance is increased. Whoever gives food to a fasting person to break his fast, shall have his sins forgiven, and he will be saved from the Fire of Hell, and he shall have the same reward as the fasting person, without his reward being diminished at all." [Narrated by IbnKhuzaymah]

`Abdullah ibn `Amr reported that the Messenger of Allah (saw), said: "The fast and the Qur'an are two intercessors for the servant of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. The fast will say: 'O Lord, I prevented him from his food and desires during the day. Let me intercede for him.' The Qur'an will say: 'I prevented him from sleeping at night. Let me intercede for him.' And their intercession will be accepted." [Imam Ahmad]

SahlibnSa'd reported that the Messenger of Allah (saw): "There is a gate to Paradise that is called ar-Rayyan. On the Day of Resurrection it will say: 'Where are those who fasted?' When the last [one] has passed through the gate, it will be locked." [Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim].

Fasting

**The Second Section which is the Second Treatise**

On the Month of Ramadan

**SECOND POINT**

One of the many instances of wisdom in the fast of the blessed month of Ramadan with respect to thankfulness for God Almighty’s bounties is as follows:

As is stated in the First Word, a price is required for the foods a tray-bearer brings from a royal kitchen. But, to give a tip to the tray-bearer, and to suppose those priceless bounties to be valueless and not to recognize the one who bestowed them would be the greatest foolishness.

God Almighty has spread innumerable sorts of bounties over the face of the earth for mankind, in return for which He wishes thanks, as the price of those bounties. The apparent causes and possessors of the bounties are like tray-bearers. We pay a certain price to them and are indebted to them, and even though they do not merit it, are over-respectful and grateful to them. Whereas the True Bestower of Bounties is infinitely more deserving of thanks than those causes which are merely the means for the bounty. To thank Him, then, is to recognize that the bounties come directly from Him; it is to appreciate their worth and to perceive one’s own need for them.

Fasting in Ramadan, then, is the key to a true, sincere, extensive, and universal thankfulness. For at other times of the year, most of those who are not in difficult circumstances do not realize the value of many bounties since they do not experience real hunger. Those whose stomachs are full and especially if they are rich, do not understand the degree of bounty there is in a piece of dry bread. But when it is time to break the fast, the sense of taste testifies that the dry bread is a most valuable Divine bounty in the eyes of a believer. During Ramadan, everyone from the monarch to the destitute, manifests a sort of gratitude through understanding the value of those bounties.

Furthermore, since eating is prohibited during the day, they will say: “Those bounties do not belong to me. I am not free to eat them, for they are another’s property and gift. I await his command.” They will recognize the bounty to be bounty and so will be giving thanks. Thus, fasting in this way is in many respects like a key to gratitude; gratitude being man’s fundamental duty.

**THIRD POINT**

One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting from the point of view of man’s social life is as follows:

Human beings have been created differently with regard to their livelihoods. As a consequence of the difference, God Almighty invites the rich to assist the poor, so that through the hunger experienced in fasting, the rich can truly understand the pains and hunger which the poor suffer. If there was no fasting, there would be many self-indulgent rich unable to perceive just how grievous is hunger and poverty and how needy of compassion are those who suffer them.

Compassion for one’s fellow men is an essential of true thankfulness. Whoever a person is, there will always be someone poorer than himself in some respect. He is enjoined to be compassionate towards that person. If he was not himself compelled to suffer hunger, he would be unable give the person-by means of compassion-the help and assistance which he is obliged to offer. And even if he was able, it would be deficient, for he would not have truly experienced the state of hunger himself.

**FOURTH POINT**

One instance of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan with respect to training the instinctual soul is as follows:

The instinctual soul wants to be free and independent, and considers itself to be thus. According to the dictates of its nature, it even desires an imaginary dominicality and to act as it pleases. It does not want to admit that it is being sustained and trained through innumerable bounties. Especially if it possesses wealth and power in this world, and if heedlessness also encourages it, it will devour God’s bounties like a usurping, thieving animal.

Thus, in the month of Ramadan, the instinctual soul of everyone, from the richest to the poorest, may understand that it does not own itself, but is totally owned; that it is not free, but is a slave. It understands that if it receives no command, it is unable to do the simplest and easiest thing, it cannot even stretch out its hand towards water. Its imaginary dominicality is therefore shattered; it performs its worship and begins to offer thanks, its true duty.

**FIFTH POINT**

One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan from the point of view of improving the conduct of the instinctual soul and giving up its rebellious habits is as follows:

The human soul forgets itself through heedlessness. It cannot see the utter powerlessness, want, and deficiency within itself and it does not wish to see them. And it does not think of just how weak it is, and how subject to transience and to disasters, nor of the fact that it consists merely of flesh and bones, which quickly decline and are dispersed.

Simply, it assaults the world as though it possessed a body made of steel and imagined itself to be undying and eternal. It hurls itself onto the world with intense greed and voracity and passionate attachment and love. It is captivated by anything that gives its pleasure or that benefits it. Moreover, it forgets its Creator Who sustains it with perfect compassion, and it does not think of the results of its life and its life in the hereafter. Indeed, it wallows in dissipation and misconduct.

However, fasting in the month of Ramadan awakens even the most heedless and obstinate to their weakness, impotence, and want. By means of hunger, they think of their stomachs; they understand the need therein. They realize how unsound are their weak bodies, and perceive how needy they are for kindness and compassion. So they abandon the soul’s pharaoh-like despotism, and through recognizing their utter impotence and want, perceive a desire to take refuge at the Divine Court. And they prepare themselves to knock at the door of mercy with the hands of thankfulness. So long as heedlessness has not destroyed their hearts, that is.

**What is the Wisdom in Fasting?**

The hawk's swooping contributes to the sparrow's alertness and agility. Although rain, electricity, or fire sometimes harms people, no one curses them. Fasting may be difficult, but it provides the body with energy, activity, and resistance. A child's immune system usually gains strength through illness. Gymnastics are not easy, but they are almost essential to bodily health and strength. People's spirits are refined through worship and meditation as well as through illness, suffering, and hardship. These allow them to acquire Paradise, for God gives a large reward for a little sacrifice. Hardships and sufferings promote people to higher spiritual degrees, and will be returned manifold in the other world. This is why all Messengers experienced the most grievous hardships and sufferings.

Hardship, suffering, and calamity cause believers' sins to be forgiven, warn them away from sins and the seductions of Satan and the carnal self, help them appreciate God's blessings, and open the way to gratitude. Also, they urge the rich and healthy to be concerned about the ill and the poor and to help them. Those who have never suffered cannot understand the condition of those who are hungry, sick, or stricken with a calamity. In addition, these afflictions may help establish closer relations between different social sectors.

**The role of intention in fasting**

Intention has a prominent place in our actions, for God's Messenger told us that our actions are judged according to our intentions. Intention is the spirit of our actions, for without it there is no reward. If you remain hungry and thirsty from daybreak to sunset without intending to fast, God does not consider it a fast. If you fast without intending to obtain God's good pleasure, you receive no reward. So whatever one intends, one gets the reward thereof. Those who have a firm belief in God, the other pillars of faith, and the intention to believe in them will be rewarded with eternal felicity in Paradise. But those who are determined not to believe, who have removed the inborn tendency to believe from their hearts, will be victims of their eternal determination and deserve eternal punishment. As for those with deeply ingrained unbelief and who have lost the capacity to believe, we read in the Qur'an: *As for the unbelievers, it is the same whether you warn them or warn them not. They will not believe. God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes there is a covering* (Baqara 2:6-7).

**Favoring the Heart as Opposed to the Flesh**

Human life is a composite of two distinct powers: the spirit and the flesh. Although they sometimes act in harmony, conflict is more usual—conflict in which one defeats the other. If bodily lusts are indulged, the spirit grows more powerless as it becomes more obedient to those lusts. If one can control the desires of the flesh, place the heart (the seat of spiritual intellect) over reason, and oppose bodily lusts, he or she acquires eternity.

Compared with previous centuries, people may well be wealthier and enjoy more convenience and comfort. However, they are trapped in greed, infatuation, addiction, need, and fantasy much more than ever before. The more they gratify their animal appetites, the more crazed they become to gratify those appetites; the more they drink, the thirstier they get; the more they eat, the hungrier they get. They enter into evil speculations to feed their greed to earn still more, and sell their spirits to Satan for the most banal advantages. And so they break with true human values a little more each day.

To sacrifice one's enjoyment of worldly pleasures has the same significance for human progress as roots have for a tree's growth. Just as a tree grows sound and strong in direct relation to its roots' soundness and strength, people grow to perfection whose striving to free themselves from selfishness so that they can live for others.

**Spiritual practices during Ramadan**

**Muhasaba (Self-Criticism or Self-Interrogation)**

Self-criticism may be described as seeking and discovering one's inner and spiritual depth, and exerting the necessary spiritual and intellectual effort to acquire true human values and to develop the sentiments that encourage and nourish them. This is how one distinguishes between good and bad, beneficial and harmful, and how one maintains an upright heart. Furthermore, it enables a believer to evaluate the present and prepare for the future. Again, self-criticism enables a believer to make amends for past mistakes and be absolved in the sight of God, for it provides a constant realization of self-renewal in one's inner world. Such a condition enables one to achieve a steady relationship with God, for this relationship depends on a believer's ability to live a spiritual life and remain aware of what takes place in his or her inner world. Success results in the preservation of one's celestial nature as a true human being, as well as the continual regeneration of one's inner senses and feelings.

**Tafakkur (Reflection)**

Reflection is a vital step in becoming aware of what is going on around us and of drawing conclusions from it. It is a golden key to open the door of experience, a seedbed where the trees of truth are planted, and the opening of the pupil of the heart's eye. Due to this, the greatest representative of humanity, the foremost in reflection and all other virtues states: "No act of worship is as meritorious as reflection. So reflect on God's bounties and the works of His Power, but do not try to reflect on His Essence, for you will never be able to do that."[1] By these words, in addition to pointing out the merit of reflection, the glory of humankind determines the limits of reflection and reminds us of our limits.

**Shukr (Thankfulness)**

True thankfulness in one's heart is manifested through the conviction and acknowledgment that all bounties are from God, and then ordering one's life accordingly. One can thank God verbally and through one's daily life only if personally convinced, and if one willingly acknowledges that his or her existence, life, body, physical appearance, and all abilities and accomplishments are from God, as are all of the bounties obtained and consumed. This is stated in: *Do you not see that God has made serviceable unto you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth, and has loaded you with His bounties seen or unseen?* (Luqman 31:20), and: *He gives you of all that you ask Him; and if you reckon the bounties of God, you can never count them* (Ibrahim 14:34).

Of course, one should try to increase in all virtues during Ramadan, as this is the best time of year to do so.