

Welcoming R A M A D A N

Ramadan is a great and blessed month. The objective of the sacred month is not to starve and deprive yourself of what otherwise would have been permissible to you during the day; rather its purpose is to achieve piety and righteousness.

O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may achieve Taqwa (God consciousness)- [al-Baqarah, 2 : 183]

The real objective of fasting is to become conscious of our Creator and Maker, to increase our awareness of His Majesty, and to exalt and glorify Him for the guidance He has given us. Furthermore, to appreciate His greatness and to recall the blessings He has bestowed upon us, so we may be grateful and thankful to Him.

The month of Ramadan is not only the month of fasting. It is also the month of the Qur'an.

Ramadan is the (month) in which the Qur'an was sent down, as a guide to mankind, also Clear (Signs) for guidance and the differentiation (between right and wrong) ... [al-Baqarah, 2 : 185]

In an agreed upon *ahadeeth* narrated on the authority of Abu Hurairah (RA), the Prophet (SAW) informed us; "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan out of faith (i.e. belief) and hoping for a reward (from Allah (SWT)), then all his past sins will be forgiven." Similarly he (SAW) said; "Whoever stands (in prayer) in the month of Ramadan out of faith (i.e. belief) and hoping for a reward (from Allah (SWT)), then all his past sins will be forgiven."

We learn a couple of things from the *ahadeeth* quoted above:

- 1) The month of Ramadan has dual aspects:
 - a) Fasting during the day, and
 - b) Standing (in prayer) in the night (reciting the Qur'an)
- 2) Intention- purity of intention

In regards to the fasting side of the glorious month, abstaining from food has great ramification on the person observing the fast - physical as well as spiritual. Abstaining from food is an exercise for the discipline and control of the self, the baser self. One learns how to restrain his urges and desires. Fasting frees the person from the bondage of lusts and desires. Abstaining from intakes also reminds us of the less fortunate ones, the poor and the destitute. Fasting gives us a general sense of how they feel. It boosts the morale of the poor by knowing that even kings have to go hungry for a while. Fasting makes the rich realize and understand what the poor goes through day after day. Fasting also purifies ones heart and tongue. One is urged to control himself and learn how to abstain from talking behind peoples back (backbiting), lying, and cheating. This is a great month for the purification of oneself from the qualities of *Nifaq* – hypocrisy, which Muslims are not exempt of.

Spiritually speaking, this month is a great month in the sense that it is the month in which the Qur'an was sent down to the earthly heaven from the protected and preserved tablets, and the Books greatly held in honor. The intent of its revelation is for the guidance of mankind in general, the believers in particular, and to deliver them from the darkness of *Jahiliyah* to the light of Islam. The Qur'an, the Guidance, the Light, is such a great gift from the Creator to the created. If only one really opens his heart to the Qur'an, and let its Light penetrate the depths of his heart, it will surely illuminate his way to the final and intended destination, *Janatul-Firdaws*. Remember that the Qur'an was the instrument Muhammad (SAW) used in order to change the hearts of the people and bring about a complete political, social and economic change to societies.

Reciting the Qur'an not only draws us nearer to Allah (SWT), but also rejuvenates our spirit and soul. This is the main source of nourishment of the soul. Realistically speaking, this is the month where one is to review what he has memorized throughout the year, just like the Prophet (SAW) used to do with Jibreel (AS).

The Qur'an makes the perfect compliment to Ramadan.

On the other hand, intention is most important to any action. The Prophet (SAW) stressed in numerous *ahadeeth*, reported by many *sahabah* and narrated by many *Muhadditheen*, that all actions begin with the intention. Our intention must be pure for the sake of Allah (SWT); to seek His good pleasure and none else. Anything other than that intention could ruin us in this life as well as the next. If we approach this month with the proper intention we shall reap the fruits and the rewards of this great month in this life and the next, Insha-Allah. Otherwise one would get only starvation and be deprived of Allah (SWT)'s guidance. Those who intend to fast to lose weight and/or quit smoking may achieve their objective, similarly, those who approach the Qur'an for anything other than guidance may very well receive the title of Qari' or 'Alim and the respect of people in this life. The real question is what will they get in the hereafter?

Unfortunately the fasting and the standing (*taraweeh*) of the month of Ramadan have become a ritual with us, a mere habit. Fasting becomes a torture where one gains none but hunger and thirst and that's what the Prophet (SAW) had told us on the authority of Abu Hurairah in *Musnad Ahmad*. The Prophet (SAW) reported to have said that, "How often one fasts and gets out of it

nothing but hunger and how often one stands (in prayer) and gets nothing except staying up at night.”

In the same way the Prophet (SAW) informed us of the three types of people whom Allah (SWT) will be judging in His grand court- a courageous fighter, a Qari' ('Alim), and a giver of charity. Each of them will be dragged to the Hellfire because of their intention. May Allah (SWT) help us make our intention solely for His sake, Ameen.

In summary, we, honored Muslims have double duties toward the month of Ramadan, to discipline the animal side of our existence and nourish and feed the spiritual side.

Those who want to get full advantage of the virtue and grace of this month should fast for the sole purpose of increasing their *Taqwa* and awareness of Allah (SWT), and dedicate all the nights to the reciting and understanding of the Qur'an.

Here are a few tips that might help you achieve the real objective of the great month of Ramadan:

- 1) Most television and satellite stations advertise their Ramadan entertainment programs that are full of rubbish. Abstain from such programs and dedicate the precious time to the reciting of the Qur'an and sharing the life of the Prophet (SAW) with your family.
- 2) Refrain from passing time in the shopping malls and other places. Use that quality time to come close to Allah (SWT) by worshipping Him through reciting the Qur'an, making *zikr*, supplicating, giving charity, and calling others to good.
- 3) Abstain from listening to music, vain talk, backbiting, cheating, obscene and vulgar language.
- 4) Contemplate on yourself, and spend some time on self-assessment. List the things you are doing in which you know upset Allah (SWT). Be honest with yourself in this exercise and come up with a sensible and practical solution(s) to the problems. Remember to seek help from Allah (SWT) first and foremost and truly have the desire to change yourself. Allah (SWT) promised to find a way out for you, Insha-Allah.
- 5) Cut down as much as you can from the worldly activities including work, and spend the time in worshipping Allah (SWT).
- 6) Do *zikr* while driving to work or going to any place.
- 7) Spend in charity out of the bounty of Allah (SWT) for His sake. Your spending for His cause during this month should be more than any other month. The Prophet (SAW) was more charitable during the month of Ramadan than any other month for the great rewards one receives during that month - up to 700 times and more. The first recipients of charity should be your relatives, thus strengthening the bond of kith and kin.
- 8) Make sure that you calculate your *zakatul-mal* and that it is paid by the end of Ramadan. There is this misconception that the taxes we pay is *zakah*. That's false.

- 9) Strive to complete the recitation of the Qur'an twice. Once during *Taraweeh* and once on your own.
- 10) Try to get up at least an hour before dawn and perform *Tahajjud* (you may read from the Qur'an while praying - only in Fard Salah one is not permitted to hold the Qur'an and recite from it). Reserve the last 15 minutes or so for *suhoor*.
- 11) Get up for *suhoor*, eat and drink something before the break of dawn. The Prophet (SAW) recommended that we do that. There is *Barakah* in *suhoor*. The Prophet (SAW) suggested that we delay the *suhoor* till near the time of dawn.
- 12) This is the month of forgiveness. Increase your supplications to Allah (SWT) and ask for pardon and forgiveness. Increase your supplications during your salah especially during prostration (*sujood*). One is closest to Allah (SWT) when he is performing *sajdah* and the Prophet (SAW) said, "Increase your supplications."
- 13) Invite your kith and kin, friends and others over for *Iftar*. The Prophet (SAW) said whoever feeds others the angels will pray for him.
- 14) Reconcile any disputes you might have with anyone including your family. Forgive your brother and/or sister for any injustice they may have done to you and strengthen the bond of brotherhood with love and mutual respect.
- 15) Don't forget to supplicate before breaking your fast. The Prophet (SAW) said, "As a fasting person is about to end his fast, he is certain to have a prayer answered." Begin your supplication by saying: "Bismillah. O Allah, for You I have fasted and from Your blessings and provisions I break my fast." Please supplicate for yourself, your family, and your Muslim brothers and sisters everywhere. Pray that Allah (SWT) helps us change ourselves so that our condition may change.
- 16) Control your anger. That is going to be your biggest test!
- 17) Look forward to *Lailatul-Qadr* and ask Allah (SWT) to make you among those who will witness that great night which is better than 1000 months. If you happen to witness that night don't ask for a Mercedes rather ask for forgiveness and a place in Paradise. Pray for the good of the *Dunya* and *Akhirah*.
- 18) It is highly recommended that you spend the last ten days (if you can) in devotion and *Ibadah* to Allah (SWT) by performing *'Itikaf* in the masjid.
- 19) This is a perfect opportunity to introduce a new *Ibadah* to your other *Ibadaat*. If you are not doing it already please consider praying two *raka'at*, *salatud-Duha*. *Salatud-Duha* may be performed 10-15 minutes after sunrise till shortly before *Zawal* (when the sun is at its highest point). Continue to practice that after Ramadan.
- 20) Never forget to thank Allah (SWT) for all His blessings. Show your gratefulness by being sincere to Him and by fulfilling your obligations and duties, most notably the struggle for the establishment of the Just Social Order.