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All Gregorian dates for the month of Muharram subject to the sighting of the new moon.

**Special Occasions**

- **Ramadhan 1 / Sept 13:**  
Iftar Program from 1st till Eid-ul-Fitr (contact Islamic Center for details)
- **Ramadhan 8 / Sept 20:**  
Wafat of Abu Talib (AS) bin Abdul-Muttalib, 1 year before Hijrah
- **Ramadhan 10 / Sept 22:**  
Wafat Hazrat Khatijah (SA)
- **Ramadhan 14 / Sept 26:**  
Martyrdom of Hazrat Hamza (AS) – Battle of Uhud
- **Ramadhan 15 / Sept 27:**  
Birthday of Imam Hassan (AS)
- **Ramadhan 17 / Sept 29:**

**Editorial Note**

Assalamu Alaikum Brothers and Sisters in Islam

The staff of VOW, the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors of Muslim Congress are thrilled to see that this issue of VOW, marks the completion of its one year of service.

By the Grace of Allah (SWT) and the blessings of the 14 Infallibles (*Masumeen*) the VOW team has seen the growth in the readership and feed back from the *momineen*, has kept them going over the last year and are looking forward to service in the future. Hopefully the VOW team will grow to meet the future challenges.

The VOW team would like to wish its readers, supporters and in general all Muslims a **A Blessed Ramadhan Al-Mubarak** and would like to remind them to please keep the VOW team, the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors of Muslim Congress and all the Muslims in their Prayers and Dua's during this holy month of *Ramadhan*.

The theme for the next two e-newsletters will be:

**Spiritual Values – November 2007**

Suggested topics: What are spiritual values? How do you acquire spiritual values? Spiritual values as nutrition for the soul, why spiritual values benefit the individual and the community, etc. The deadline to receive articles is September 30, 2007.

**Muharram / Martyrdom – January 2008**

Suggested topics: What is the Islamic point of view on Martyrdom? How do you elevate yourself to understand Karbala? What is the message of Karbala? Are We truthful to this message? Is the message being preserved and passed on to the next generation. The deadline to receive articles is November 30, 2007.

Please try to submit these articles in Word 6.0 format. Once submitted, these articles become the property of Muslim Congress (MC), and MC reserves the right to edit these articles before publication.

We ask Allah (SWT) for His support and blessings for all *Muslimmeen* in these very challenging times. As followers of the Holy Prophet (SAWA) and his *Ahl-ul-Bayt (AS)*, we are blessed with role models, but the challenge of living up to the expectations is upon all of us.

To send ideas and suggestions for the e-newsletters, please email us at [newsletter@muslimcongress.org](mailto:newsletter@muslimcongress.org).

**Muslim Congress News**

Dear Brother/Sister - (Conference Attendee), Assalamo Alaykum:

It was a great pleasure to meet you during the recent MC conference at Orlando. We really appreciate your kind advice and suggestions during the networking meetings and other interactions during the conference.

Insha-Allah, we will take your advice into serious consideration when mapping out a future plan for Muslim Congress. We also hope that you found this conference beneficial for Islam and yourself as a result. We would love to continue to work with sincere brothers like yourself and hope to send you further correspondences shortly asking for your help with respect to future projects serving the Islamic communities throughout North America.

Insha-Allah, together we can establish a strong platform leading to the formation of a dignified Islamic community in North America through which Islam would be served and safeguarded till the reappearance (*zahoor*) of Al-Hujjat (*atf*).



Battle of Badar 2 A.H.

Wa'ssalam and Duas,  
MC Board's and Volunteers

**Ramadhan 18 / Sept 30:**

- Shab-e-Zarbat Imam Ali (AS) is fatally struck

**Ramadhan 19 / Oct 1:**

- Amir-ul-Momineen Imam Ali (AS) injured during Fajr Prayers

**Ramadhan 21 / Oct 2:**

- Night of Martyrdom of Imam Ali (AS)

**Ramadhan 22 / Oct 3:**

- Martyrdom of Imam Ali (AS)

**Ramadhan 23/ Oct 5:**

- Lailat-ul-Qadar. Last Friday of Ramadhan

**Zilqadah 1 / Oct 13:**

- Eid-al-Fitr

**Zilqadah 8 / Oct 20:**

- Jannatul Baqi Graves Demolished – 1926 AD

**Zilqadah 9 / Oct 21:**

- Beginning of the Greater Occultation of Imam Al-Mehdi (a), 329 A.H./ 844 A.D.

**Zilqadah 17 / Oct 29:**

- Battle of Khandaq or Ahzab (Trench War) 5 A.H.

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## VIEWPOINT: RAMADHAN

### - In the Words of the Prophet of Islam

*This the famous sermon of the Holy Prophet of Islam- found in many authentic books such as "Wathia tul Shia - Vol 10. Page 313 by H. Amoli.*



"O! Men and women! Draws near unto you the blessed month overflowing with advantages, mercies, ready to put up your sins of omission and commission to Allah for obtaining His forgiveness.

Its days, nights and hours, in the estimation of Allah, are more than the days, nights and hours of the other months. It surpasses all other months in merits and favors.

In this month you are the guests of Allah, enjoying His hospitality. You are from among His favorites. Your breath "praises Allah", your sleep is His worship; your prayers receive His approval; your invocations are sanctioned.

So, sincerely, free yourself from evil and sinful thoughts and actions with a clear conscience. Pray and request that He may give you heart and confidence to observe the fast and recite the **Holy Qur'an** and *dua'a* throughout this month.

He who does not receive mercy and forgiveness in this month is really ill-fated, unfortunate, condemned to ever-lasting unhappiness and deprivation.

Thirst and hunger you undergo, feel and live through the here and now, bring to your memory the severity and sharpness of the drought and starvation that will be the order of the day on the Day of Judgement.

Give alms to the poor and the destitute. Treat your parents and elders with respect. Be kind and loving to your children and juniors. Take care and look after your kith and kin.

Keep from giving tongue to that which should not even be whispered. Shut your eyes to that which is indecent. Turn a deaf ear to that which is too slanderous for all ears.

Be compassionate, gentle and benign unto orphans so that after you, your children, if need be, receive the same treatment from others.

Turn repentant to Allah and seek His nearness. After every prayer recite *dua'a* to invoke His mercy and forgiveness because the most suitable time to get fulfillment of desires is when you have prayed the *salaat*; the Almighty gives answer to His servants who call Him in these moments.

O people! In truth and fact, your bodies and souls are held in pledge; strike a bargain to set them free by asking forgiveness from Allah.

Your backs are burdened with a hard-to-endure load of sins, prostrate yourselves in adoration of Allah a great deal, to make the drag less heavy, because the Lord of the Worlds has given His Word, in the name of His Might and Honor, not to take to task those who pray and prostrate in this month, the flames of the fire will not frighten them.

O people! Whosoever provides a meal to the faithful at the time of breaking the fast, earns the recompense of setting an enslaved human being free.

O people! In this month, whosoever makes his or her morals better will cross the "Bridge of *Siraat*" with ease and finesse, where people at every step would stumble and fall; Whosoever gives leisure and respite to his or her employees will receive equivalent leniency on the Day of Reckoning.

Whosoever takes care of and looks after the orphans and relatives will be treated mercifully on the Day of Judgement.

Whosoever prays optional prayers (*supplications*) will get the immunity from Hellfire and praying of obligatory prayers (*salaats*) in prime time multiplies the good in leaps and bounds.

Whosoever recites even one verse of the **Holy Qur'an**, obtains the reward of a full recital of the whole Book in the other months.

O people! In this month, beyond a shadow of doubt, the doors of the everlasting bliss and happiness are thrown open, so beseege Allah not to ever shut them off in your face. The traps of eternal curse are

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unhinged, so make a request to Allah to remove them from your path forever. The devils are held in chains so pray to Allah not to set them free.

The month of *Ramadhan* is the most blessed of all months; pure, generous and merciful. Do not let its nights go to waste in slumber or its days in careless omission or loss of their remembrance of Allah. "

## Hadith for Thought<sup>1</sup> : On Being Thankful

Hajj Massoud Nashatizadeh

Once again Br. Hajj Massoud shares his knowledge and thoughts in his own unique style, which is refreshing and thought provoking.



### Archives:

### Publication Dates:

January, March, May, July, September, November

### Disclaimer:

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شُكْرُ كُلِّ نِعْمَةٍ الْوَرَعُ  
عَمَّا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ. " أمير المؤمنين علي (ع)

"Thankfulness for every blessing is abstention from the things Allah has forbidden." Imam Ali (AS)

Thankfulness (*shukr*) is always in respect to a blessing. In his glossary of Islamic terms **Mut'radaatir-Raghib**, the eminent writer, Raghib Isfahani, suggests that thankfulness is to recognize a blessing and then to affirm it. The antithesis of thankfulness is ingratitude (*kufri*) or the concealment of a favor. He states that thankfulness has three components: the first is gratefulness of the heart, and it is the remembrance of a favor; the second is thankfulness of the tongue, and it is the expression of gratitude for a blessing; and the third is thankfulness of the limbs, and it is the returning of a favor with good deeds, to the extent of one's ability.

Tabarsi, the acclaimed author of **Maj'ma'ul Bayan**, the famous exegesis (*tafseer*) of the **Holy Qur'an**, asserts that "thankfulness is to acknowledge a favor with humility." A thankful person is one whose demeanor is indicative of his gratefulness.

Islam, in a concise assertion, invites human beings to demonstrate their gratitude in practice rather than words. It suggests that to give a sincere thanks to every blessing, one must avoid the forbidden. For example, Imam Ali (AS) explains that the thankfulness of the eye is to read the **Holy Qur'an**, to study, to seek knowledge, and to view and contemplate on the nature of things. The Holy Imam also speaks of the intensity of the Holy Prophet's regard to thankfulness to the extent that he worshipped Allah (SWT) constantly for ten years, standing on his feet until they were swollen and his luminous face turned yellow. He spent a large portion of the night in devotional prayers, and he remained steadfast until he received the following admonition:

مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَى. طه آية ٢

"We have not revealed unto you (Mohammad) this Qur'an that you should be distressed." (Holy Qur'an 20:2)

Allah (SWT) is adamant that everyone receives what he deserves, and for whoever is thankful in words and deeds, He will bless him and increase his provisions and prosperity. Such a person is called thankful (*shakir*).

Unfortunately, people are often ungrateful and seldom acknowledge Allah's blessings. Sometimes this arises because the perception of the great majority of mankind falls short of the necessary depth to fully appreciate the magnitude of the Divine Benevolence and His unmerited favors. There are those, in addition, who attribute all their blessings to their own efforts. Qaroon, the infamous tycoon, ascribed his good fortune to his own knowledge. The Holy Qur'an alludes to that in Surah Al-Qasas:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيتهُ عَلِيمٌ عِنْدِي. طه القرآن الكريم

"He (Qaroon) said: 'This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have.'....." (Holy Qur'an 28: 78)

There are also those who continue their evil ways and at no time give thanks for their blessings. They receive an abundance of worldly provisions, i.e., riches and good health, yet they still remain defiant and

indifferent. This is a very deplorable state called entrapment (*istidraaj*). Therefore, if good fortune and affluence were combined with gratefulness, no one would encounter the perils of *istidraaj*.

From the contents of the timeless *du'a*, supplications reported from the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his progeny (AS), it is certain that at no time can anyone sufficiently thank Allah (SWT) for His boundless favors and blessings. Thus, thankful servants are those who ascertain and confess their deficiencies and acknowledge their inability to show gratitude. Of course, the utter recognition and acknowledgment of this indisputable fact intrinsically signifies the ultimate thankfulness.

وَاللَّهِ لَوْ تَقَطَّعَتْ أَعْضَائِي وَسَالَتْ تَغْلَتَايَ  
عَلَى صَدْرِي لَنْ أَقُومَ لِلَّهِ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ شُكْرُ  
عَشْرِ الْعَشِيرِ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْ جَمِيعِ نِعْمِهِ  
الَّتِي لَا يَحْصِيهَا. (الإمام زين العابدين عليه السلام)

"If all my limbs were ripped to shreds and each one of my eyelashes were plucked out (in exchange for a favor), I would never be able to give thanks for even one tenth of one of Your (Allah's) favors."  
(Imam Zein-ul-Abideen (AS))

There is sufficient evidence from the authentic oral traditions of the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad (*ahadith*), that in order to be truly thankful to Allah (SWT), one must sincerely be grateful to others. The following two prophetic *ahadith* are prime examples:

إِنَّ أَشْكَرَ النَّاسِ أَشْكَرُهُمُ لِلنَّاسِ.

"Verily, the most grateful person is the one who gives better thanks to people." (The Holy Prophet (SAWA))

مَنْ لَا يَشْكُرُ النَّاسَ لَا يَشْكُرُ اللَّهَ.

"Whosoever does not thank the people is not thankful to Allah." (The Holy Prophet (SAWA))

It is reported that the Holy Prophet (SAWA) said, "On the Day of Judgment, someone will be summoned to stand in the presence of Allah (SWT). He would then be ordered to advance toward the fire. He cries out 'Oh Lord, I have recited Your Qur'an!' Allah (SWT) answers, 'You have not offered thanks to My Benevolence.' He then implores, 'Oh, Merciful! I have given thanks for each one of your favors and every blessing that You have bestowed upon me.' Allah (SWT) replies:

لَا أَقْبَلُ شُكْرَ عَبْدٍ لِنِعْمَةٍ أَنْعَمْتُهَا عَلَيْهِ حَتَّى  
يَشْكُرَ مَنْ سَأَقْتَهَا مِنْ خَلْقِي إِلَيْهِ.

'I have decreed for Myself not to accept any thanks from My servant unless he is thankful to those who brought him My blessings.'"

It is in the context of thankfulness that the indispensability of Allah (SWT) to man is highlighted. Just as His presence and the remembrance of Him give meaning and purpose to the believer's life, a rhetorical expression of thankfulness without a corresponding good deed is superficial in nature, and futile.

It is narrated from the Holy Prophet (SAWA) that Allah (SWT) revealed to Prophet Musa (AS), "Oh Musa, offer unabated thanks to My favors." He replied, "Oh Lord! How could I give worthy thanks while there is no thanks unless it is also one of Your favors?" Allah (SWT) announced, "Oh Musa, since you that is only frequented by eminent have acknowledged that this, too, is one of My favors, now you truly have thanked Me."

In Islamic thought, Allah (SWT) is ceaselessly active, and without His activity, the activity of man and nature becomes pointless and self-abortive. Man is an entity among the other entities of the macrocosm, and Allah (SWT) is not one of them. He is not just a being among other beings, rather, He alone is the One who constitutes all things. Thus thankfulness or ingratitude by His servants would not alter His Majesty. It is on this premise that the importance of thankfulness can be brought home to those who care to reflect, so that *shukr* ceases to be a not just a trivial verbal gesture, but it is a combination of thought and behavior that gives a believer his Islamic integrity. In the light of this, it is possible to perceive afresh the meaning of the highly misunderstood term '*shukr*'.

Mullah Ahmad Naraqj, in his classic work **Mae'rajus-Sa'adah**, elucidates that thankfulness is the supreme

station on the path of enlightened, pure, and virtuous believers. Hence it is not attainable by all, but only for a few who reflect. It is for that reason that the Supreme Author of the worlds, in His glorious book, the **Holy Qur'an**, states:

وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ. "القرآن الكريم"

"..... '.....but few of My servants are grateful!" (Holy Qur'an 34: 13)

Furthermore, in a solidly Islamic backdrop, where all matters of significance contain aim and purpose, a true believer, who is given unrestricted access to all attainable resources, is prompted to see the indescribable magnitude of favors and exhibit sincere recognition by effectively using what is granted to him. Allah (SWT) tells us, "***Do ye not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made his bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are among men those who dispute about Allah, without knowledge and without guidance, and without a Book to enlighten them!***" (Holy Qur'an, 31: 20)

<sup>1</sup>The pronouns "he, him and his" that are frequently used in this series of "Hadith for Thought" do not pertain to gender. They signify mankind, both male and female.

All English translations of the Qur'an texts are according to Abdullah Yusufali; <http://www.al-islam.org/quran/>.

## RAMADHAN:

### How to Get the Most Out of it

Syed Mujahid Hussain



**"Ramadhan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (Between right and wrong). ..."** (Holy Quran 2:185<sup>1</sup>)

The holy month of *Ramadhan* surpasses all the other months in merits and favors. In this month, you are the guest of Allah (SWT), your prayers receive His approval, and your invocations are sanctioned. He who does not receive mercy and forgiveness in this month is really an ill-fated unfortunate person, condemned to everlasting unhappiness and deprivation. Here are a few suggestions to get the most out of the holy month of *Ramadhan*:

#### THANK AND PRAY TO ALLAH

Thank Allah (SWT) for making you a Muslim and giving you the guidance (*hedayat*) and opportunity (*tawfiq*) to fulfill your religious obligations for the holy month of *Ramadhan*. Also thank Him for keeping you alive and in excellent health so you can benefit from the holy month of *Ramadhan*. Pray to Allah to provide you with the patience and strength to take advantage of this time of the year. Pray to Allah (SWT) that all your efforts during this month will be approved and accepted by The Most Glorious One.

#### PREPARE AND PLAN

To get the most benefit during the holy month of *Ramadhan* preparation and planning are the key. Based on your specific case preparation, you may have to start in the holy month of *Shaban*.

**Religious Preparation:** Part of the preparation in this is to especially review once again the rules and regulations that pertain to the religious duties especially during this month. First and foremost if you have missed some days of fasting last year, plan to complete them before the start of *Ramadhan*, according to the religious guidelines.

Some general rules and regulations may not be specifically applicable during this month, but nevertheless are very important for the acceptance of all your prayers and fasts, for example *khums* and your Islamic will.

*Khums:* You may need to review this situation, with the Islamic Scholar or a'alim at your local Islamic Center and your accountant, and then make the necessary arrangements. If you have never acted on this religious edict, you definitely need to sit down with the a'alim; be sure to allow ample time for this.

*Islamic will:* This is another obligatory task. If you have one, check to see if it needs to be updated. If you do not have an Islamic will, you will need to complete it. Based on your specific situation you may need to consult with an accountant, a lawyer, the a'alim at the local Islamic Center, and members of your family household.

Do not neglect these important religious edicts.

**Medical Preparation:** It is a good idea to have your annual health check before the holy month of *Ramadhan*. If you feel that you will not be able to fast during the holy month of *Ramadhan*, based on your medical history, such as, you are pregnant, or if you have a chronic illness, then it is mandatory that you consult with an a'alim and a Muslim doctor, and follow their advice.

If you will not be fasting because of medical reasons, you must pay the religious dues (*kaffarah*) for this, before the holy month of *Ramadhan* starts.

**Nutritional Preparation:** The time between meals is long and is longest if the holy month of *Ramadhan* falls in summer. You will want to especially eat healthier, concentrating on foods that last long and provide better proper nutrition. Foods with a low glycemic index, which are slow to digest and are slow in energy conversion. You may also want to avoid foods that are rich in salt to avoid the pangs of thirst.

**Mental Preparation:** This is as important as any other preparation. You may have to be more focused and motivated in order to go through the rigors of this holy month. Different techniques are needed to motivate different people. You may already know how to motivate yourself; if you don't then you will have to work on this important factor. Understanding the ideology of fasting, and importance of divine commands should be good starting place.

**Time Management:** Time will be short especially as the holy month of *Ramadhan* progresses, and all the important dates fall in the second half of the month. All the activities and the lack of sleep start to take their toll as the month progresses. So be careful to pace yourself and manage your time wisely. You may even want to take some time off from work to catch up.

### SET GOALS

Following the practices of the holy month of *Ramadhan* was never meant to be an exercise in futility. In addition to fulfilling your religious obligations of fasting, these practices are meant to make you a better Muslim, which contributes to the community as a whole. Set realistic goals that will make you a better Muslim. Plan carefully to achieve your goals and the goals of your community during this month. Completing the reading of the Holy Qur'an once is a noble goal. However, strive to do even better than that - memorize parts of the Qur'an that you don't know. Better still, ponder the words and apply them to your daily life. If you start applying (practicing) one ayah in your daily life, you will have understood the real message of *Ramadhan*.

### TRACK THE PROGRESS

It is essential that you keep track of your progress towards your goals. Remind yourself that your goals are within reach, especially in the holy month of *Ramadhan* since these days have been blessed by Allah (SWT).

### GIVE CHARITY

Charity is the test of your commitment to the Message of Allah (SWT), and to pass you should give all the tender loving care you can give to Muslims who are in need of help. If you give regularly during the year, this is the time to increase your giving. If you give only during this month, make a start to give throughout the year, for your giving will always be linked to the holy month of *Ramadhan*.

If the pangs of hunger during the early part of the month don't remind you about the starving Muslims around the world, nothing will. Do something about it. Feeding an orphan or the hungry have great rewards - contact your Islamic center (*masjid*) and make the necessary arrangements.

### PARTICIPATE

Time is a very scarce resource in this country. We all feel the lack of time to do all the things we like to do. However, Muslims need to make the time to go the Islamic center or *masjid* in this month. Time spent in the Islamic center or *masjid* will be greatly rewarded; the rewards are higher if you have added to your learning and/or your piety. There is nothing more important than spending time with Muslim brothers and sisters in an Islamic environment. The success of your whole community is directly related to the amount of time you spend at the Islamic center or *masjid* learning about Islam.

The stronger the community, the easier it is to achieve the goals. It is also easy to defend your beliefs and faith. Muslims, who want Islam and their communities to succeed in this part of the world, are active participants at the local center or *masjid*.

### REALIZE YOUR STRENGTH

The holy month of *Ramadhan* was meant to give you a taste of your own strength and will-power. To show you the path to reach the next level of piety (*taqwa*), refrain from eating and drinking, control your desires, and control your transient pleasures. This is a starting point on the road seeking salvation of your body and soul. It is essential that the level of piety reached in this month be maintained during the rest of the year.

### PROPAGATE

There are more Muslims in your community than you know. Most of these Muslims are not active in the local Islamic center/*masjid*. Introduce them to your center/*masjid* and its programs. Consider yourself very lucky if these Muslims just visit once. Encourage them to visit more often and participate in the activities. Many non-Muslims are curious about *Ramadhan* and the whole concept of fasting; this is a great

opportunity to introduce them to Islam.

### CONTEMPLATE THE MESSAGE

In the privacy of your own thoughts, think about the real message of *Ramadhan* and its contribution towards the message of Islam. Think how you can become a part of it.

### CONCLUSION

On the day of the great feast (*Eid-ul-Fitr*), Muslims, even the ones who did not complete their obligatory duty, will offer the prayers (*salaat- ul-Eid*). They will thank Allah (SWT) for His merciful bounties and pray for the acceptance of their actions during the holy month of *Ramadhan*.

Some Muslims will have mixed emotions, happy for the completion of their obligatory duties and sad for the end of the month of *Ramadhan*. A few faces will glow; those are the ones who know that their humble offerings were accepted by the Most Glorious One.

The rewards for the successful completion of the holy month of *Ramadhan* for the individuals, community, and the Muslim *Ummah* are many-fold in this world. Assessing the rewards in the hereafter is also no small matter, as only the Most Glorious One is aware.

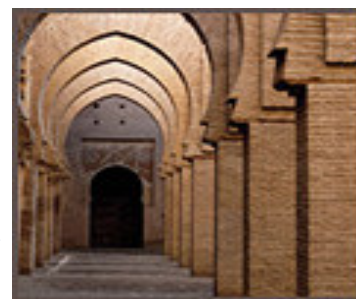
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<sup>1</sup>English translations of Qur'anic text are according to Abdullah Yusufali (<http://www.al-islam.org/quran/>)

## Fasting: Its Philosophy and History

**Syed Hadi Abedi**

*The human being is composed of the body and the soul. The body and the soul have their own unique requirements. The human body's properties and needs are similar to those of other material, living things of this world. These increase and reduce in volume and weight, gain and lose energy and strength, and they react and combine with other material things. The body then needs food, clothing and shelter, so that it may survive for some period of time.*



The human being is composed of the body and the soul. The body and the soul have their own unique requirements. The human body's properties and needs are similar to those of other material, living things of this world. These increase and reduce in volume and weight, gain and lose energy and strength, and they react and combine with other material things. The body then needs food, clothing and shelter, so that it may survive for some period of time.

On the other hand, the soul is free from the material properties and physical needs. The soul always tries to achieve spiritual qualities and occupy higher levels of Divine values. Soul tries to know the Divine secrets and earn Divine blessings. The soul wants to travel beyond the material world. Human history has proved that human souls can reach the highest levels of spirituality and divinity. Thus, it is possible for the soul to travel beyond this material world.

One may ask then, "Why is it that most human beings cannot achieve any spiritual level nor their souls earn any admirable Divine blessing?" We also see that the majority of human beings adopt the wrong path, and often reduce their status to below that of animals and spend their whole life in that status.

The answer is that the human body, due to its desires, holds the soul captive, never allowing it to be free to achieve high level spirituality. Thus, the soul does not have a chance to achieve its own desires.

The desires of the body and the desires of the soul are like the two pans of a balance - if one pan goes up, the other will come down. Some people give so much importance and attention to the body and its needs and desires that they completely ignore the requirements and needs of the soul. The soul thus becomes captive and weak. On the other hand, some people give importance to only soul and spirituality, ignoring the natural needs of body. This also results in disaster. The correct way of life is to maintain a balance between the body and soul. (so Islam supports and takes care of both, while giving more importance to the soul being superior)

The body needs food and exercise to keep it healthy and active, as does the soul. The body is material so its food is also material. The soul is non-material hence its 'food' is also non-material.

Although the body and soul should remain balanced, there is always a fight between them for control, and there are other qualities of a human being that affect this battle. Lust is a human quality that takes its birth and strength from the body and is a partner and supporter for it. Alternatively, wisdom and intelligence are the partners and supporters of the soul. When the body is fed, lust is empowered, and will be active until it is satiated or the body loses its energy due to hunger. Once lust is inactive, the body is at rest. When the body is at rest, wisdom becomes active, helping the soul to achieve its desires and goal. Thus, only when lust is inactive and the body is at rest can wisdom help the soul achieve its desires and Divine blessings. This can be achieved by fasting.

Fasting, then, is very important for human beings to achieve the desires and goals of soul. Food, exercise and rest are necessary to keep the body active, just as fasting is necessary to keep wisdom and the soul active and healthy. For the same reason, fasting is an important factor of worship in every religion of the world. Fasting has been a part of human custom since ancient times. It is mentioned in the **Qur'an, Bible, Torah, Mahabharata, and Upanishads**. Fasting is also practiced in many other religious traditions and spiritual practices. It is in fact an integral part of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Although there are vast differences regarding the mode of fasting and the conditions applied to it, the central idea of fasting is present everywhere.

As we see from the following details of fasting in several religious traditions, fasting in Islam is the highest developed institution among them.

**Islam:** In Islam fasting is one of the cardinal doctrines of the faith, taking its rank next to only the five daily prayers. To fast, one should abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, sexual activities, lying about God, His apostles and imams and as-Sayyedah Fatimah(SA), immersing the head in water, vomiting, injecting anything into the body, allowing dust or strong smoke into the throat, etc. The Holy Qur'an gives the basis of fasting: "***O, you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may safeguard yourselves with full awareness of Divine laws. (It is) for a fixed number of days, but whoever among you is sick or on a journey, then (the same) number of other days, and those who find it hard to do should effect a redemption by feeding a poor man; and whosoever, of his own accord, does good, it is better for you, if you know.***" (Qur'an Surahs 2:183-184)

**Christianity:** In the Bible, fasting is discussed in the book of Isaiah, chapter 58:3-7. There it says that fasting is to abstain from satisfying hunger or thirst, and any other lustful needs for which human beings yearn. The blessings gained from this are stated to be substantial. Fasting is a practice in many Christian denominations. For charismatic Christians fasting is done in order to seek a closer intimacy with God, as well as an act of petition. For Orthodox Christians the idea of fasting is to come closer to God, to realize one's excesses, and to engage in almsgiving. Fasting without increased prayer and almsgiving is considered useless or spiritually harmful. In Protestantism fasting, usually accompanied by prayer, is considered to be an important part of their personal spiritual experience, apart from any liturgical tradition. Other Biblical accounts of fasting include:

Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights while in the desert (**Matthew 4:2**)

Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights while he was on the mountain with God (**Exodus 34:28**)

Jesus said, "But this kind [faithful] does not go except by prayer and fasting". (**Matthew 17:21**)

And he (Jesus) said unto them (disciples), "This kind [one who can perform miracles] can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." (**Mark 9:29**)

**Judaism:** Fasting is considered a core principle of Judaism, where there are three essential potential purposes of fasting: achievement of atonement for sins, omissions in Divine services- neglecting divine duties like charity and prayer, and commemorative mourning and gratitude.

**Hinduism:** Fasting in Hinduism is a very integral part of religion. Individuals observe different kinds of fasts based on personal beliefs and local customs. In his code, the Manu Smriti, the great Hindu lawgiver, Manu, prescribes fasting for the removal of the five capital sins. In addition, he describes that diseases that are pronounced incurable by doctors are cured by fasting. All diseases have their origin in overeating and verily fasting is the only method to cure this. An occasional complete fast is greatly desirable for all to keep up good health, to give adequate rest to the internal organs and maintain celibacy.

**Jainism:** There are many types of fasting in Jainism. Fasting is supposed to decrease desires and passion. The goal is to purify the body and to abandon desires.

Therefore, we see that fasting is an important factor of worship in every religion of the world and fasting in Islam is a highly developed institution.

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## 10 Benefits of Fasting (Saum)

Moulana Syed Abbas Aleyia

### 1. Fasting is a shield from the hellfire:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "*Assaumu junnatun minannar*" or "*Fasting (in which all parts of the body have a share) is a shield from the fire.*"

### 2. Fasting is the charity (zakat) of the body:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "*Lekulli shay-in zakatun wa zakat ul-adan as-siyam*" or "*For everything there is a charity (i.e., from everything, charity has to be given), and the charity of the body is fasting.*"

### 3. Angels pray for the one who fasts:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "Wallazi nafsu muhammadin beyadihi, lakhaloofu fam is-saaimi 'indallahi atyabu min reeh is-misk" or "I swear upon He who has the life of Mohammad in His control (Allah), the odor of the mouth of a person fasting is better in the eyes of Allah than musk."

### 4. Prayers are answered for those who fast:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "La turaddu da'wat us-saaim" or "The prayers of the one who fast is not rejected."

### 5. Fasting is the best jihad:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "Afdhal ul-jihad as-saumu fil-har" or "The most superior jihad is fasting in the hot weather."

### 6. Fasting contributes to a healthy well-being:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "Soomu tasihhu" or "Fast, and you will get healthy."

### 7. Fasting results in social equality among classes:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "Innama faradh allahu as-siyama leyastawi behil-ghadeyyu wal-faqeer" or "Allah made fasting an obligation to make the rich and the poor equal through it (fasting)."

### 8. Allah forgives the sins of those who fast:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "Man saama ramadhanan eemaanan wa ihtesaaban, ghafar allahu lahu ma madha min zunubeih" or "Whoever fasts a month of Ramadhan with faith and accountability (towards his sins), Allah forgives his past sins."

### 9. Paradise is keen towards him who fasts:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "Innal-jannata mushtaqatun ila arba'atin, ila mut'im il-jee'aan, wa haafiz il-lisaan, wa taalil-quraan, wa saaimi shahri ramadhar" or "Paradise is keen towards four: the one who feeds the hungry, and the one who controls his tongue, and the one who recites the Qur'an, and the one who fasts in the month of Ramadhan."

### 10. He who fasts is rewarded for constant worship ('ibadat) of Allah:

As the holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said: "As-saaimu fi 'ibadat illahi wa in kaana naaiman 'alaa firaashihi maa lam yaghtab muslimari" or "The one who fasts is constantly in the worship of Allah, even if he is sleeping on his bed, as long as he does not backbite (commit gheebat) of a Muslim."

## Night of Power (Laylatul Qadr)

Moulana Shamsud Haider

The most important month of the year is the blessed month of Ramadhan, and the most important night of the year is the Night of Power or *Laylatul Qadr*. The revelation of the Holy Qur'an took place on this night, an incident that signifies an eternal cosmic relationship existing for this night between the realm of *Amr*, where hidden divine treasures lay, and the realm of *Khalq*, where an apportioned part of this treasure is revealed.

The divine commands descending through this night, along with the angels and the Spirit, create a celestial bond between the Master (*mawla*) (SWT) and His representative (*wali*) (AS) on the earth.

Considerable emphasis is found in *hadith* and literature on experiencing the reality of this night. Hajji Mirza Jawad Agha Maliki Tabrizi explains 'witnessing the cosmic phenomenon in this night' in his book (**Suluk-ul-Arifan**: 128). The special acts (*'amal*) of this night are also directed at enabling a person to see the descent of angels and destination of affairs, exactly as they are seen by the Imam of the Age, *Vali Asr* (ATF).

The Divine treasures are revealed in specific proportions, from the world of hidden treasures to the physical world, and from there to this material world. Those who 'see' this event feel a joy and ecstasy that cannot be described. Perhaps this is similar to when Ibrahim saw the Kingdom of Heaven (*malakut*) as described in the Holy Quran:

**"So also did We show Ibrahim the power and laws of the heavens and the earth." (Qur'an 6:75)**

With this context in mind, if you look at the following traditions, you will appreciate the significance of worship (*ibadat*) during this night:

1. Ibne Abbas quoted the Holy Prophet (SAWA) as saying, "I teach you a prayer (*salat*) that if you performed it, you will see the Night of Power every night, twenty times or even more in the following manner: Four rak'at prayer with one salutation (*salam*): in every rak'at, one time - Surah *Al-Fatihah*; three times - Surah *Al-Kafirun*; and three times— Surah *Al-Ikhlās*. After finishing the salutation, recite the praise (*tasbeeh*) of Fatimah al-Zahra (SA) thirteen times and the invocation '*astaghfirullah*' thirteen times."

2. During this night, the prayers of all are accepted; the prayer of no one remains unanswered except the

following:

- a) The one who has displeased and angered his parent and was declared disinherited or rebellious by them;
- b) The one who has cut-off his relationship with his kith and kin;
- c) The one who possesses animosity and vengeance toward a believer in his heart; or
- d) The one who consumes alcoholic drinks.

Deeds that deprive us of the blessings of this night must be avoided. Would it not be worth preparing oneself a whole year in order to gain Allah's (SWT) favors in this night, which are more valuable than a thousand months full of *ibadat* and *jihad*?

What if, instead of one whole year, one would just prepare oneself from the first night of *Ramadhan* to experience the pleasures of one night and earn salvation from the Lord of Heaven and Earth? (Shaikh Husain al-Bahraini in **al-Siraj**)

The spiritual pleasures, mentioned so far, are in addition to the rewards (*thawab*) mentioned traditionally about the Night of Power, such as the following:

The holy Prophet (SAWA) said, "On the Night of Power, the gates of Heaven are opened. There is no servant who offers prayer in this night, but Allah for every prostration stores a tree in the Paradise – the tree whose branches and shade is so vast that if a rider travels for one hundred years through its shade he would not be able to cross it; for every rak'at would build a home for him in the Paradise - the home decorated and built by pearls, topaz, and rubies; for every verse recited – a crown from the crowns of Paradise; for every praise (*tasbeeh*) a bird from the birds of Paradise; for every sitting – a rank from the ranks of Paradise; for every witnessing (*tashahhud*) – a chamber from the chambers of Paradise; and for every salutation – a robe from the robes of Paradise, would be bestowed upon him by Allah. And at the breaking of the dawn, companions – youthful and sympathetic, *houris* of Paradise – pure and decorated servants, obedient and well-uniformed, horses –most obedient and swift, flowers, greenery, and good smells, running elegant fountain streams, and many other bounties which make the soul pleased and eyes shined, would also be bestowed upon him by Allah (SWT)'.

What should I do to attain that status?

- Read *du'a* of *Ramadhan* from the very first day, asking for the favors of the Night of Power.
- Observe the etiquette of the specific nights of the 19th, 21st and 23rd, the latter of which is of highest virtue. This etiquette includes a suitable place, dress, perfume, charity (*sadaqah*) to the poor.
- Select virtuous deeds that are more in harmony with one's mood from the point of view of sincerity, heart's presence, and internal purification, seeking help from Allah (SWT) and His chosen ones (AS).
- Meditate and ponder when one is free from sleep, overeating and pangs of hunger.
- Do not neglect Allah (SWT).
- Do connect (*tawassul*) to the infallible ones (Masumeen (AS)).
- Cry and shed tears: Put your hands around your neck, place dirt on your head, put your head against a wall, or sometimes stand and sometimes cry. Image yourself on the Day of Judgment, visualizing way the sinners are rebuked with harshness, and you should rebuke yourself accordingly. Then look to the right where the followers of the righteous (*Ashab-e-Yameen*) will appear with their splendor, and then to the left where the followers of the evil (*Ashab-e-Shimal*) will appear with blackened faces, swollen eyes, tied hands, and burnt skins - angels standing in readiness to execute Allah's command to throw him or her together with them inside the Hell.
- Cry out to Allah (SWT) with "Ya arhamar rahimeen, ya ghayas al-mustaghseen! Ayna rahmatukal wasi'a, ayna atayakal fazila, ayna fazlulal azeem, ayna mannukal jaseem, ayna karamuka ya kareem?" or "O Thou who are the most compassionate, and Thou Who are the shelter of shelterless ones! Where is Your vast blessing? Where is Your infinite forgiveness? Where is Your Love and Benevolence?"

It is also recommended to perform one hundred rak'at of prayer. This would be with the intention of praying individual (*furada*) prayers because recommended prayers cannot be done in congregation (*jamaat*), unless one does it with the intention of making-up (*qaza*) of previous obligatory prayers. Also, doing a hundred rak'at depends on the strength and ability of the worshipper.

Keeping in mind then the value of this night and all the ways that we can honor the Night of Power, I beseech Allah (SWT) to help us and give us the guidance and ability (*tawfeeq*) to be able to experience the favors of the Night of Power. Ameen.

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## Question & Answer

Collection from various Islamic Scholars

**Q: What are the criteria for the beginning and ending of an Islamic month, with special emphasis on the holy month of Ramadhan?**

A: The Islamic month depends on the lunar calendar, i.e., it depends

on the sighting of the crescent moon at the end of each month after the sunset in the western skies. **They ask you concerning the moon, say, 'There are times appointed for the benefit of men' (The Holy Qur'an 2:189).** It is obligatory for Muslims to look for the moon at the end of each Islamic month in order to start the next Islamic month.



The holy month of *Ramadhan* is especially important to the Muslim nation because it relates to your service to Allah (*'ibadat*) by means of fasting, and to the fasting holiday (*Eid -ul- Fitr*). It is necessary to establish the end of the month of *Shaban* and thus the start of the month of *Ramadhan*. Similarly, to establish the end of the holy month of *Ramadhan* and the beginning of the month of *Shawwal*, it is important to sight the moon.

The Holy Prophet (SAWA) said: "Start your fasting with the sight of the crescent and break it with its sight." ("*Suomo le-roeyateh wa-ftoro le-roeyateh*"). If a person has seen the moon, then he can start his fast or celebrate the holiday (*Eid*). However, he cannot force, order or encourage others in the public or his family including his wife and children to do so. If a person has not seen the moon, he can depend on the following conditions:

- i. If a person sees the new moon by himself.
- ii. If a group of Muslim believers (*momineen*) witness the new moon, and the listener gains certainty (*yaqeen*) upon their witness, or anything else with which a person gains certainty (*yaqeen*).
- iii. If two just (*a'adel*) *momins* sight the moon and give their witness, then one can start his fast or celebrate the holiday (*Eid*).
- iv. If 30 days have been completed for the month of *Shaban* or *Ramadhan*, then one can start his fast or celebrate the holiday (*Eid*). (NOTE: a lunar calendar month does not have 28 days or 31 days)
- v. If the Islamic leader *al-Waleyy al-Faqeeh* who is the *al-Haakim ash-Shar-iee*, gives a verdict (*hukm*).

**Q: Under what conditions can a person miss a fast?**

A: The conditions under which a Muslim is allowed to break his/her fast are:

- i. During travel - *See the question on travel restrictions below.*
- ii. During illness, on the advice of a Muslim doctor.

Keep in mind that any missed fastings MUST be made up before next *Ramadhan*, and any penalty fee (*kaffarah*) for breaking the fast must be made in the current year. For the penalty fee (*kaffarah*) information, see further in this article.

**"For certain number of days; but whoever among you is sick or on a journey, then (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days; and those who are not able to do it may effect a redemption by feeding a poor man; so whoever does good spontaneously it is better for him; and that your fast is better for you if you know." (The Holy Qur'an 2:184).**

The specific conditions for people who can miss their fasts are:

- i. The elderly person who cannot fast because of weakness due to age,
- ii. A person with the sickness of thirst who cannot live for few hours without water. Check with a Islamic Scholar (*A'alim / Moulana*).
- iii. A pregnant woman who knows that fasting will either harm herself or the child.
- iv. The nursing mother or the wet nurse who has very little milk and if she fasts there will not be enough milk for the child or she will become sick.

These people MUST:

- i. Pay the penalty (*kaffarah*) i.e. he should give food- wheat or barley etc. -as compensation to a poor *momin* (*'faqeer'*) - Islamically defined poor person- , equalling 750 gms which is one *'mudd* ( which is estimated nowadays to be \$2.50 per person) (required or *wajib*) in the form of food ONLY. (It is recommended (*mustahib*) to pay \$5per day).
- ii. Make up their missed fasts before next *Ramadhan*.

**Q: A believer (*momin*) has been invited for the fast-breaking dinner meal (*iftar*) by a friend. If he accepts this invitation he cannot go to the Islamic center for *iftar* or prayers (*a'amaal*). What course of action is recommended?**

A. A *momin* has a great opportunity in the holy month of *Ramadhan*, especially in the USA, to participate in the program at the Islamic center. If there is no Islamic center then one MUST create this special gathering with family, friends and neighbors to get the benefit of this holy month. During *Ramadhan*, Allah's blessings, kindness, mercy and reward may be earned by reciting The Holy Qur'an and supplications

(*du'aa*), making up missed prayers, learning Islamic principles and laws (*ahkam* and *fatawa*), and giving charity (*sadaqah*). Hence one should not indulge in cooking and inviting, nor in concentrating on the pleasures of the stomach and entertaining. One should train himself to fear Allah, realize the hunger of the poor, remember the Day of Judgment and try to qualify to enter Heaven. If all this is missed, then the mercy of Allah has been missed; nothing can replace this great opportunity. The only substitute for this is to participate in the Islamic pilgrimage (*hajj*) in Arafat or wait until the next holy *Ramadhan*. But, there is no guarantee about life or tomorrow, so be careful.

**Q: What are the traveling restrictions during the month of *Ramadhan* under different religious authorities?**

A: *If a person has permanent residence in the city:*

If a person travels to a point more than 14 miles - one way - from the city limits before noon (*dhuhr*), they can break their fast after traveling about 3 miles from the city limit. If the travel is completed before noon (*dhuhr*) i.e. the person comes back to his home (*watan*) (Islamically defined home) or to a place where he intends to stay for full 10 days, provided he has not eaten anything, he can make the intention (*niyyah*) and continue the fast. If travel is within the 14 mile limit, then he cannot break the fast even if he travels the whole day. If travel is after noon (*dhuhr*), then the fast can be continued, but he cannot return home for opening of the fast (*iftar*).

*If a person has temporary residence in the city:*

If the duration of the stay is known to be at least 10 days, he has to perform the complete prayers and also should fast. However, if the duration of the stay in that city is less than 10 days, then his prayers will be short (*qasr*). This means that all the four units (*rakaat*) prayers like the noon (*dhuhr*) afternoon (*asr*) and after sunset (*ishaa*) prayers, will be only two-units (*rakaat*) in length.. In addition, he should not fast. If the duration of the stay is in doubt, and he is very reluctant about the stay, then he must pray *qasr* and he should not fast. After completing 30 days, he should say complete prayers and keep fast. This rule applies to him irrespective of his stay in the city, even if it's a day. People who are frequent travelers for any valid (*jaaz*) reason (i.e., if their job requires travel every day or every week) should say complete prayers and keep fasting even during their travel, according to some *mujtahids* (please check with your local pious scholar about the details).

In regards to the difference between the authoritative religious scholars (*maraja*):

Among the current *maraja*' there are no differences concerning this situation. However, Imam Khomeini (RA) had specific views regarding the different types of cities (large vs. small) and different types of jobs (traveling to work or work that involves travel). The followers of Imam Khomeini's (RA) religious leadership can benefit from the current the *mujtahid who fulfils the conditions (jame ush-sharaait mujtahid)* in this situation.

**Q: I) What is the importance of prescribed charity for the fasting season or *zakat ul-fitr*? II) How much is it this year? III) How does it apply to the family head/head of the household?**

A: I) *Zakat ul-fitr* is the purification of the body, as our Prophet (SAWA) said, "Everybody has to pay this at the end of the month of *Ramadhan*, before noon on the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr*." Islamically, it is better to pay at the night time as soon as the moon is sighted, and make sure it reaches the poor asap. The importance of this *zakat* are:

- a. To protect your soul, yourself and your money.
- b. To complete your fasting.
- c. To increase your income.
- d. To support the poor people, console them and make them happy.
- e. To train yourself to be kind to others.
- f. To use your money and income in the way of Allah.
- g. To stop greed for this earthly life (*dunya*).

Our Prophet (SAWA) said there are 10 types of non-believers (*kafireen*) from this Muslim nation. One of them is the person who does not pay *zakat*. Then, he has chosen to die as a Christian or a Jew. Then The Prophet (SAWA) recited Surah *Maun* (**Holy Qur'an** 107), and interpreted verse 7. He explained that *zakat* was (*maun*) was. He also referred to another Surah *Ha Mim* (**Holy Qur'an** 41), verses 6 and 7, ".... And woe to those who associate gods with Allah, -those who practice not regular charity, and who even deny the hereafter."

*Zakat* is paid to the following:

- a. a deserving faqeer (poor) person who does not have the money or source of income to suffice for one year.
- b. he must be believer having faith in the 12 imams' walayah (*momin*).
- c. a person of the lineage of the Prophet (SAWA) (*sayyed*); he can take *zakat ul-fitr* ONLY from another *sayyed*, but cannot take the *zakat ul-fitr* from a *non-sayyed*, i.e. the *zakat* of only a *sayyed* can be given to a *sayyed*

If you cannot find any person with these qualifications, give the *zakat* to a pious religious scholar (*a'alim*) or seek his assistance in disbursing the *zakat*. (Or ask your Islamic center.)

II) The amount of the *zakat ul--fitr* is three (3) kilograms of the basic type of food that is consumed in four (4) meals in your household.

Using the four (4) types of food our Prophet (SAW) mentioned, it is \$2.50 per meal. Hence, the *zakat* will be \$10 per person. This applies to a normal middle-income family. The more prosperous i.e. those who usually eat costly food throughout the year MUST pay more than this amount, the amount MUST be commensurate with their life style.

NOTE: If a person has paid *khums*, then the *zakat* is \$10.00 per person. If a person has never calculated his *khums* and not paid it yearly, then he MUST pay \$12.00 per person for *zakat*. This is only the *khums* on the *zakat*; he still owes the rest of his *khums*.

III) This applies to every Muslim who supports his family and has dependents. *Zakat* must be paid in the name of:

- a. All dependent children (irrespective of age - babies, newborns, etc.)
- b. Dependent parents and grandparents - Male/female
- c. Muslim or non-believer
- d. All dependents for whom financial support is provided irrespective of their financial status and proximity
- e. Guests that stay on the eve of *Eid*

The head of the household pays for all the people in the household; it should be paid to the poor and should be paid out before noon (*dhuhr*) on the day of the holiday.

NOTE: Since it is difficult to identify a poor *momin* in the U.S.A. and Canada, the *zakat* can be handed to a Islamic Scholar (*a'alim*) to disperse it according to the *shariah* to the deserving.

## RAMADHAN: A Medical Viewpoint:

**Qamber Jafri M.D**

**"O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God wary" (Holy Quran 2:183)**

*Ramadhan* is an ideal month for a spiritual and health tune - up.



Fasting in its true manifestation is a divine prescription for self control, achieving God consciousness, piety and gives everyone an opportunity to have a direct connection with Allah SWT with supplication. The spiritual aspects of *Ramadhan* are beyond the scope of this article and I will briefly discuss the physical and mental health benefits of fasting and provide some health guidelines.

The Holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) said "Fast and you will be healthy" There has been extensive research on the health, physical and mental - benefits of fasting. The physiological effect of fasting leads to better control of blood sugar, lipids (cholesterol), blood pressure, and weight. This has led to the improvement in patients with mild -moderate hypertension and diabetes, reducing the chances of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular complications. Fasting provides rest to the digestive system which processes food. The body utilizes its storage capacity in providing energy. Glycogen stored in the liver and fats in tissues are decomposed and transferred into calories, ultimately leading to improved weight balance. If one follows the Sunnah and doesn't over - indulge at breakfast before sunrise (*suhr*) or when the fast is broken at *maghrib (iftaar)* time, one will truly see the benefit. The Prophet has advised us to divide our portions into three parts - food, water and air; meaning to keep 1/3 of our stomach's empty. Imam Ali A.S. has advised us not to make our stomachs the graveyards of animals. Studies have shown that discontinuation of eating before you feel full leads to improvement in gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), prevents obesity, and it's associated complications. Overuse of diet rich in animal fat leads to heart disease, cancer, obesity and stroke, just to name a few of the common diseases.

Moderation is the key to our living. "Eat and drink but be not extravagant" Holy Quran 7:31. Imam Ali (AS) advised us "Do not eat unless you are hungry. Stop eating while you are still hungry. Chew food deliberately. Use the toilet before sleeping. You will not need medicine if you follow these practices". So to achieve the true benefit of fasting, don't become a glutton either at breakfast (*suhr*) or at the time of the evening meal (*iftaar*)!

Fasting is an ideal time for self control and to abandon any form of addiction. For smokers this is an opportunity to quit. Studies in Muslim countries have shown that the crime rate falls during the month of *Ramadhan*! According to a hadith of the Prophet of Islam " Fasting darkens Satan's face, while charity breaks his back, Love for Allah's sake and assisting others in doing good deeds cuts off Satan's tail and seeking Allah's forgiveness splits his spine. For everything there is purification (*zakat*) and the purification of the body is to fast". The word *Ramadhan* comes from the root *Ramd* - burn - as it burns away our sins -

according to a hadith of our Holy Prophet.

If *Ramadhan* is followed correctly, it should improve our spiritual, physical and mental well being. Some basic advice from the medical point of view is as follows:

- Muslims with health problems particularly with advanced diseases should seek advice from their own physician for their particular concerns as these are general guidelines. The doctor can evaluate and adjust your medicines, and provide specific guidelines.
- As much as possible maintain a balanced diet without overindulging. Consume food from each food group = fruits, vegetables, white meat like chicken, fish and dairy products.
- Consume slow digesting foods which digest slower (6-8 hours) rather than fast digesting foods with a high sugar content (3 - 4 hours). Foods that contain grains, barley, wheat, oats, legumes, whole meal flour, unpolished rice vegetables and fruit are slow digesting foods. Avoid refined carbohydrates that contain sugar, such as white flour, as these are fast digesting foods.
- Avoid sleeping after breakfast (*suhur*) and overeating at the evening meal (*iftaar*) to prevent heartburn. If possible allow a gap of 2-3 hours from eating at night *ammal* to help food digest.
- Avoid fried and fatty foods.
- Too much tea /caffeine at breakfast (*suhr*) time will make you lose valuable mineral salts.
- Drink enough water between the evening meal (*iftaar*) and breakfast (*suhr*) to adjust body fluid levels.
- Almonds are rich in protein and fiber and less in fat. Bananas are a good source for potassium, carbohydrates and magnesium.
- To avoid abdominal bloating and wind (flatulence) avoid gas producing foods like cabbage, onions, eggs, lentils and carbonated beverages. Adding "Beano" or ajmor while cooking will help to cut down the "gas content".
- To avoid headaches from caffeine/tea or smoking withdrawal, cut down on the intake slowly over a period of weeks prior to *Ramadhan* so that the body can adjust to a smooth transition.
- Reorganize your schedule prior to *Ramadhan* to adjust sleep cycle.
- In the same manner that one starts on an exercise program prior to Hajj, one needs to be cognizant of the fact that one will be doing more prayers (*salat*) during *Ramadhan*. An exercise program prior to *Ramadhan* will do your knees a lot of good to prepare you for the night of power ( *Lailatul Qadr*)! With each unit of prayer one burns 10 extra calories.

Fasting is a direct connection with our Lord as only Allah knows who is truly fasting in all its aspects. Our Holy Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) has said" If one does not give up falsehoods in words and actions, Allah has no need of him giving up food and drink" Let us pray that Allah gives us the *taufeeq* in understanding and implementing the true meaning of *Ramadhan*.

## The Unique Al-Qur'an - Al-Alifi

Raza Sadiq

The **Al-Qur'an Al-Alifi** is a unique tribute to the glory of Allah (SWT). Proclaiming the glory of the Lord, every line begins with 'alif', the first letter of Allah's name and the first letter of the Arabic alphabet. Representing 23 years of revelation (*vaha*) from the Prophet Mohammad (SAW), this classic of Qur'anic calligraphy (*khattati*) has 23 lines on each page and, as a tribute to the creation of the universe in six days, each chapter (*surah*) is calligraphed in exactly six pages – without deviating in the slightest from the Holy Qur'an as revealed by Allah (SWT). Each page is decorated with a colorful border utilizing eight natural stone colors. It also contains two letters from The Prophet (SAW) to his governors and eight letters from five different Imams (AS). This is the only one of its kind ever published in the 14 centuries since the birth of Islam.



Qur'anic calligraphy is the soul of Islamic art. The creation of 22 years of dedicated labor, this rare publication embodies the true essence of Qur'anic calligraphy over the last 14 centuries. The "*bismillah*" in the **Al-Qur'an Al-Alifi** exhibit 113 exquisite specimens of Islamic calligraphy from the Prophet's (SAW) time to the present, indexing each style and the era in which it was created. Pakiza Raqam Moulvi Mohammad Yusuf Qasimi Asimabadi, one of the greatest calligraphers of our time, pens this Qur'an in the classical '*Khat-e-Naskh*' style. As you turn the richly ornamented pages, you will marvel at the exquisite illuminations in the colors of the seven precious jewels, developed by master craftsmen over the centuries.

Its pure leather cover comes with intricate calligraphic designs, hand-embossed in gold by traditional artisans. It is available in three colors – brown, green, and red. The outer case is elegantly crafted from the finest Austrian pinewood, finished in gleaming lacquer and lined with the softest velvet.

Indeed, this unique Qur'an needs to be treasured in every Muslim home, enriching those who read it and at the same time encouraging the Muslims who have worked on this beautiful **Al-Qur'an - Al-Alifi**.

# Discipline

**Abbas Zaidi Age: 14 years**

Discipline is one of the most vital qualities spurring the immense economic growth in America. It has led Americans to great success. Without this necessary characteristic, America would never be able to achieve its commanding social and economical position.

This is a unique quality that is extremely rare in all countries with the exception of America. This trait is the basis for success in any matter. This one trait contributes greatly to the improvement of American society. The cause of orderly implementation of all laws and regulations is discipline. Without laws and regulations and its strict implementation, there would be utmost chaos, destruction, and ruin. You can also observe a clean environment in America. There are paved roads and sidewalks, beautiful plants, and neat houses. All of this is a result of strict discipline. This characteristic is also the basis of the strict schedules and a unique code of behavior that exists in American society. This unique code of behavior has deep roots in the concept of discipline. It is also the vital point that keeps American society running smoothly.

A similar case can be made with regards to England and other well-disciplined countries. From the above information, we can conclude that discipline is the key to success. Areas with this quality spur with growth and have a very nice, smooth society.

In countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, as well as various parts of South America and Africa, there is widespread death and decline. Robberies, murders, and kidnappings are rampant. People fight and kill each other over simple things such as food, water, or property. There are very few rules and most of them are not enforced. The root cause of all these terrible occurrences is a lack of discipline or order in society.

As a young Muslim American it is my duty to incorporate this quality of discipline in my life first.

It says in the Holy Qur'an, "***O you who (claim) to believe! Why don't you practice what you preach?***" (Qur'an 61:2)

Therefore, I must first set an example for others. Actions are in many cases more meaningful than words. My next step should be to add discipline to my whole family. Family order is an essential element of Islam. Islam cannot survive without it. Then, I am sure that many will learn from my example if I truly try to add order to my lifestyle. Next, I should try to incorporate this imperative quality in the Muslim community. This is my obligation as it is required in Islam to be a strong, united Ummah. Everyone must stand united helping each other through all their difficulties.

The holy Prophet of Allah said, "The Muslim Ummah is like one body. If the eye is in pain then the whole body is in pain and if the head is in pain then the whole body is in pain."

Thus, I must fulfill my duty by helping to incorporate discipline into the Muslim community. Finally, I should also try to help my neighborhood establish discipline. Many people may consider all these endeavors as impossible. It is difficult, of course; however, it is possible. And imagine the unlimited rewards of Allah that one can receive by acting in that way. You will receive rewards not only for yourself, but also for each person that you have encouraged to bring discipline into their lives.

As a young Muslim, there will be extra obstacles to overcome throughout this whole process. Many Americans have set up in their minds certain stereotypes for Muslims. They believe that all Muslims are terrorists. They are afraid of Muslims and a few of them have a vehement hatred toward Muslims. It will be hard to deliver this message while facing people with such despising views about you. Another setback will be my age. Many people do not give enough rights to children and consider any work done by them to be of no value. If you look a little deeper into the cause of these problems, you will again end with the same answer: lack of discipline! If Muslim society was strictly organized, then we would have easily conveyed the truth about Islam to the Americans. This would remove any hatred or fear from their hearts. And if we had an organized society, we would judge actions by their importance and their quality. We would not look at who is performing these actions.

Many new immigrants are not used to America's strict discipline and system of governing society. Even though maintaining strict discipline is a great thing, it can be a source of many problems for people not used to this type of life. Many immigrants may have a hard time adapting to this new lifestyle. Some of the actions they take, which will not result in any harm in their home country, is a violation of the law in America. In the process, many immigrants who are unaware of this dramatic change are arrested. For example, in India many people offer bribes to the cops to let them go. In some cases offers of bribery are made by cops themselves. In America, one would face an additional accusation: One of committing that crime, and another of attempting to bribe the police. There are thousands of incidents of this type occurring in the U.S.A. This problem can be solved by introducing discipline to the other countries so that it won't be such a huge surprise to the immigrants. The introduction of discipline to growing countries of the world would give us countless benefits.

Many Muslim communities around the world exercise strict discipline. During speeches, prayers, or Islamic activities there is always a feeling of organization and order. Islam stresses on topics such as order, discipline, and organization. It gives great importance, to discipline in one's own life, family order, community order, unity, laws and regulations, and maintaining a balanced life. All of these aspects of Islam have to do with discipline. This is why many inspired Islamic communities are dedicated to maintaining organized programs. They start and end on a certain time. They make sure that there is silence when the

imam is speaking. They take various precautions to limit the disturbances as much as possible. These may seem like small things, but they are very hard. And, besides, a journey of thousand miles begins with a single step. May Allah reward those who are working hard, and putting a lot of effort and time, into maintaining discipline, and improving our society.

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## **Hardships of Ramadhan**

**Zainab Mirza Age: 13,**

*Ramadhan* is the 9th month in the lunar calendar. It is the month of fasting. Fasting not only means to not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset, it also means to not backbite, spread rumors, or lie about Allah or the *Ahlul-Bait*. This not only purifies the soul, but it makes you feel how many people who are poor and starving are feeling.

In *Ramadhan*, the Holy Qur'an was revealed, and it is said the doors of heaven are kept open, and the doors of hell are locked-up and kept in chains. *Ramadhan* is also called the month of the Qur'an. It is highly recommended to read Qur'an as much as possible in this month. Imam Ali (AS) also passed away in this blessed month. So we do special acts (*a'ama*) and have religious speeches (*majalis*) for our beloved Imam. \*(We don't do special acts (*a'ama*) for him, we do it for ourselves)

When I was seven years old, fasting was very difficult for me. I was so hungry that I accidentally broke my fast with a candy. Then I was very small, so I started to cry because I wanted to keep my fast but I broke it. So then my dad told me that if you eat it unintentionally, then your fast is accepted by Allah. That was my first lesson of *Ramadhan*.

Every year, I look forward to the month of *Ramadhan* so that I can have a chance to be closer to Allah (SWT). I love the traditions of *Ramadhan* - how we have breakfast in the morning and end the fast at sunset (*maghrib*), how we go to SABA center and pray there, and most of all, the feeling that we get after we fast. You get this feeling that makes you proud that you fasted.

I understand that fasting may be very difficult for younger children who are just eight or nine years old. Fasting does have a lot of hardships. For example, your body isn't used to getting up early in the morning and having breakfast, and then not eating or drinking for 12-14 hours a day. But, as time goes on, your body will get so used to fasting, that even after *Ramadhan*, it will seem strange to eat. Another example for a hardship is that your body loses energy. You will get tired easily because you don't get enough sleep. Also, at school your friends will have to run in P.E. class but since you are fasting, you probably won't be able to run with them because you will get tired. But, no matter how hard fasting may be, many people look forward to *Ramadhan* to come so they can have a chance to get closer to Allah.

If you get tired in *Ramadhan*, then you should remember the poor people that live around the world, and the pain that they suffer. They have to beg for food, when you can eat whenever and whatever you want. You can also remember Allah (SWT), and thank Him for all the things that He has given you. Remember the thirst of Imam Hussain (AS) and his companions?

On *Eid* day, you can have a lot of fun. In SABA center in San Jose, CA, they have a carnival and you can buy what you want, eat good food, girls can put henna on their hands, and play games at the *Eid* carnival. We have a lot of fun on *Eid* day, because we get to see our friends and family being so happy. For me, if I fast all the days in *Ramadhan*, I feel really proud of myself and it makes *Eid* day even more special.

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## **Ramadhan and Fasting**

**Komail Mirza Age: 9**

### **How fasting was started**

The Holy Prophet Mohammed (SAWA) started *Ramadhan*. He taught his followers how to fast and Muslims still fast today.

### **How to fast**

In fasting, your fast starts with when you eat breakfast until the *fajr* prayer (*suhur*). Then, you do not eat until the evening (*maghrib*) prayer. Not only do you not eat, but you refrain from doing, seeing, and hearing bad things. When you end your fast (*iftar*), it is recommended (*mustahabb*) to break it with dates.

### **Fasting in other religions**

Islam is not the only religion that requires fasting from its followers. Other religions have fasting rituals, but Muslims fast the most. Buddhists, Catholics, Hindus, and Jews all have fasting rituals. They all fast, but they only refrain from eating a certain food or not drinking water. Also, they generally fast on a certain day, while Muslims do it for a whole month.

### **The blessings of Ramadhan**

In *Ramadhan*, you get much reward (*thawaab*) if you read the Qur'an. Also the Qur'an was revealed to the

Prophet (SAWA) in this holy month. It's *mustahabb* to pray all night long on the Night of Destiny/Power (*Qadr*). Also, in *Ramadhan*, it is said that Shaitan is on a leash to help us realize the benefits of this month.

## Simplicity

Madiha Batool Zaidi

*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Raheem*

Amir-ul-Momineen (AS), in one of his sermons regarding people, said,

*"...God created some people who are not attracted to this world. He made them abstinent regarding worldly goods. They were attracted to the secure house to which God called them. They were patient, and put up with the hardships in life, and were eager to attain the nobility that is near God. They gave their life to please God, and their deeds ended with martyrdom. They visited God while God was pleased with them. They realized that death is inevitable for those who lived in the past and those who will live in the future. Therefore they saved up things different from gold and silver for the Hereafter. They put on rugged clothes, and ate little, and preferred nobility. They became friends for God's sake or became enemies for the sake of God. These people are guiding lights in this world, and will be surrounded by blessings in the Hereafter."*

In the month of *Ramadhan*, to empathize with those who have a less than us is not only to feel hungry, but it is to focus on a simpler lifestyle. Some may say that having less in this world means being less blessed. But I think it means only lacking what we call 'luxury' in the way we live, and this may not be all bad. There is simplicity in their lives that might serve us well to consider.

I have noticed that when people live simply, they often live happier lives. 'Simple living' means that one does not clutter their life with a myriad of unnecessary activities - they pray, eat, sleep, go to school/work/*masjid*, spend time with their family and get on with their life. When there is less going on in a person's life, they often enjoy it more. I like to call it living "drama-free"; when there is no drama, you are happier. I honestly feel that a majority of us can admit to having too much drama in our lives, but our beloved *Ahlul Bait* (AS) have a solution for this problem.

Imam Reza (AS), regarding the duties of one who has been blessed (which means everyone who is breathing) has said,

*"There are certain duties for one who owns blessings: paying the alms tax; helping his believing brothers; visiting the relations of kin; providing the means of comfort for his family; etc." Then he said, "Sometimes I receive a blessing but cannot enjoy it unless I know I have fulfilled what is incumbent upon me regarding it."*

If we learn to live simply, as our *Ahlul Bait* (AS) did, we will be successful. Some of us don't even perform those simple acts of life - like visiting family or helping a believing brother. It is our duty, and how can we enjoy all of our other blessings of wealth, food abundance, a home, car, etc., when we cannot even perform a simple act for others.

This may be one of the reasons why we cannot enjoy the simple blessings in our own life. Take rain, for example. I notice that when it rains people complain. Why? In the Qur'an it says that rain is a blessing, but to people these days, rain is bad because it makes their car dirty, their shoes and pants wet, and it causes traffic. If you ask a brother or sister living in Somalia or Kenya, where almost half the people survive on only three cups of water a day, they would say rain is a blessing. Another simple blessing is life itself, which Allah (SWT) has given us. Do you ever wonder why in some of the pictures taken in third world countries, the people, no matter what they're wearing or how "bad" their hair looks, or where they are, they smile the most beautiful smiles, because they realize, *Alhamdulillah*, they are alive.

One of the main reasons we are told to empathize with the poor when we fast is because the value in everything Allah (SWT) has given us actually registers in our brains when we think we have nothing.

We have been told to dress simply, eat simply, talk less, and remember Allah (SWT) more. Fasting gives us a chance to put those things into practice. When we fast, we should seek to completely change ourselves for the better. Imagine that we are living in a poor country, where the homes are not made of bricks and windows. Where the food is not rice, salad, meat, AND dessert. Where just about all amenities are non-existent, and where there are no shopping malls or cars to get there. Some may call a simple but viable life a poor life, but why can't we change that and call it simplicity?

Did not our Imams (AS) live in simple homes and eat simple food? Is it narrated that they spent their time running errands all day or did they spend their time worshiping their Creator and putting into action simple acts of humanity?

We have become unnecessarily wrapped up in the fast-paced society of today. Can we not live a happy life without overpriced clothing and a surplus of everything? Can we not live a happy life without making sure we go out every weekend just because it's the weekend and we have to go out because everyone else does? Can we not be simple, and maybe realize that often we are the ones creating our own problems?

It's no surprise that the young children of today have adopted the life of luxury instead of simplicity. I was working here in the daycare over the summer, and a young boy said to me happily, "Aren't my shoes cool?"

*They were 85 bucks.* " These kids are so worried about what others will think of them if they aren't up to par with society's definition of cool. So you see, as adults we are setting the example for even the youngest among us. The more we care about living simply, the more the future generations will adopt the same ways of simplicity.

And again, *Alhamdulillah*, the month of *Ramadhan* allows us to see these things, but it doesn't mean we should only realize it for a month. We should realize it and apply it in our daily lives.

The next time we want to buy five colors of the same shirt from an expensive store, eat an expensive meal at a fancy restaurant, or dress up to see a movie which costs 10 dollars, let us consider how necessary it is in the eyes of Allah (SWT), and if we are overdoing it. After all, it says in *Dua Kumayl*, that Allah (SWT) is One whose pleasure is quickly achieved (*Saree ar- Ridhaa*). This is another blessing to us; that Allah (SWT) is pleased quickly because we hope that our every action pleases Him.

Especially during this month when we are told to empathize with those less fortunate, we need to ask ourselves whether we are the ones who are impoverished of realizing Allah's (SWT) blessings. I want to end with a hadith by Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (AS) for your consideration. He said,

*"On the Resurrection Day, Allah will apologize to a needy believer, just as a brother apologizes to his brother. Allah says, 'I swear by My Honor that I did not make you poor to humiliate you. Push this curtain aside to see what I have given you instead.' Then the man pushes the curtain aside and looks at what Allah the Almighty has given to him instead of this world and he will say, 'There was no harm for me due to what You took away from me (in the earthly world) considering what you have given me instead (now in the hereafter).'"*

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## **Feedback Solicitation**

If you would like to contribute towards future issues of **VOW**, the bi-monthly Muslim Congress newsletter, please send an email with your content, write-up or suggestions to [newsletter@musimcongress.org](mailto:newsletter@musimcongress.org). You can also email questions to be answered by an Aalim in our 'Ask-the-Aalim' section. Thank you.

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**"Islam is founded on five pillars: Salat, Zakat, Hajj, Sawm (fasting), and Walayah; People took the first four, and left this (Walayah). I swear to Allah, they cannot complete/perfect the four, unless they complete them through the fifth one (Walayah)"**

*Hadith of Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) narrated in al-Kaafi, by Zurarah ibn Aayan.*