

The Month of Fasting Ramadan



Introduction

This booklet has been prepared to inform readers about the basic religious practices in the month of Ramadan. In the first section some practical information is given in the form of answers to questions. The reasons and benefits of fasting are explained in more detail in the second section.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It begins with the sighting of the crescent moon after which all physically mature and healthy Muslims are obliged to fast for the complete month. Fasting is done as an act of worship and obedience to Allah. Between dawn and sunset, Muslims abstain from all food, drink and any kind of sexual contact. In addition to this physical component, the spiritual aspects of the fast include an added emphasis on refraining from gossip, lies, obscenity and in general, any sinful act.



Allah says in the Holy Quran:

O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous ...The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful. (Al-Quran 2:183,185).



Islam is considered the religion of true submission to the Creator of the universe. Therefore it was also the religion of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. For Muslims it is not surprising to find references in the Bible about the fasting of Moses or Jesus in a very similar fashion. Other faiths also enjoin fasting, as they recognize its spiritual benefits. Fasting is thus universally known as a means of gaining self-discipline and of gaining closeness to Allah. It is the third of the Five Pillars of Islam. The others are declaration of faith (Shahadah), prayer (Salah), charitable-giving (Zakah), and the pilgrimage to Makkah (Hajj). Fasting, together with the other pillars, forms the foundation of the faith. It instills in the individual a feeling of closeness to Allah and a desire to do good deeds at all times.

Purity of both thought and action are emphasized whilst fasting. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: He who does not desist from obscene language and acting obscenely (during the period of fasting), Allah has no need that he does not eat or drink..

He also said: Fasting is not only from food and drink, fasting is to refrain from obscene (acts). If someone verbally abuses you or acts ignorantly toward you, say (to them) I am fasting; I am fasting.

It is common to have one meal (known as Suhoor), just before sunrise and another (known as Iftar), directly after sunset. The breaking of the fast (Iftar) usually consists of dates, following the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Ramadan strengthens the community: Muslims invite one another for the Iftar meals, and thereby create concern and friendship among neighbors, families and friends. Many people also take Iftar to the mosque and share it with the wider community, especially the poor and needy.

Who is supposed to fast and who isn't?

All Muslims, from the age of puberty who are physically and mentally well should observe fasting during the month of Ramadan. Islam is a practical way of life and does not place hardship on those for whom the fast would be too difficult.



[Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew. (Al-Quran 2:184).



The sick and those traveling may defer their fast until their illness or journey is over. Pregnant women and nursing mothers may also postpone the fast. The very old, who are too weak to fast,

and those who have a permanent illness that prevents them from fasting, are excused from fasting. They may feed a needy person for every day missed, if they can afford to do so. The mentally ill are also exempt from fasting. In some parts of the world the daylight hours are not regular (i.e. there's no sunset or sunrise for a period). Here Muslims follow the closest place where there are regular hours.

Why do Muslims read the Qur'an and go to the mosque more often in Ramadan?

Allah began revealing the Quran to Prophet Muhammad during Ramadan in the year 610 C.E. The Holy Quran is known as a book that is so often read, re-read and memorized, and all in its original language, Arabic. In Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to focus as much time as possible on reading, listening to and understanding the teachings of the Glorious Quran. One of the ways Muslims get closer to the Quran during Ramadan is through a long congregational prayer known as Taraweeh that is offered in the late evening after the breaking of the fast. During this prayer it is customary that the entire Quran is recited over the course of the entire month.

Laylat ul-Qadr, or the Night of Power, is a time for especially fervent and devoted prayer, and the rewards and blessings associated with worship on this night are manifold. This night is known to occur during one of the last few nights of Ramadan, thus the incentive to increase the nightly prayers during this time.

What is the celebration at the end of Ramadan?

The end of Ramadan is marked by the sighting of the crescent moon, which is followed by a day of celebration known as Eid-ul-Fitr or the festival of fast-breaking. Families wake up early in the morning, put on their best clothes and go to the mosque for the Eid sermon and congregational prayers. They thank the Merciful Allah

for having given them the opportunity to experience the blessed month of Ramadan. The day is accompanied by celebration, socializing, festive meals and modest gift-giving especially to children. But before the festivities begin, every person, adult and child, must have already contributed towards Zakat-ul-Fitra. This is the giving of a meal, or cash equivalent, to a needy person to make sure that none are excluded from this happy occasion.

The Eid celebration is not merely about feasting and socializing. There is a deep significance for those who truly observed the holy month with their fasting, abstaining from all bad habits and striving hard to earn the pleasure of Allah. For the observant, the Merciful Allah has granted Eid as a day for forgiveness of sins. The Muslim is left with a feeling of happiness and joy and a renewed energy to face the rest of the year with faith and determination. Islam teaches that the objective of life is to earn the pleasure of Allah. The spiritual closeness that can be achieved during the month of Ramadan serves this purpose for those who truly work hard to benefit from it.





What are the benefits of fasting in Ramadan?

Authored by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. It consists of nine points which explain nine of the numerous instances of wisdom in the month of Ramadan.



In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

It was the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the standard to discern true from false. (Al-Qur'an 2:185)



First Point

The fast of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam; it is also one of the greatest of the marks and observances of Islam.

There are many purposes and instances of wisdom in the fast of Ramadan which look to both Allah Almighty's Mastery, and man's social life, and his personal life, and the training of his instinctual soul, and his gratitude for divine bounties. One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting in respect of Allah Almighty's Mastery is as follows:

Allah Almighty creates the face of the earth in the form of a table laden with bounties, and arranges on the table every sort of bounty as an expression of "From whence he does not expect."(65:3) In this way He states the perfection of His Mastery and His mercifulness and compassionateness. People are unable to discern clearly the reality of this situation while in the sphere of causes, under the veil of heedlessness, and they sometimes forget it. But during the month of Ramadan, the people of faith suddenly appear as a well-disciplined army: as sunset approaches, they display a worshipful attitude as though, having been invited to the Pre-Eternal Monarch's banquet, they await the command of "Fall to and help yourselves!" They respond to that compassionate, illustrious, and universal mercy with comprehensive, exalted, and orderly worship. Do those people who fail to participate in such elevated worship and noble bounties deserve to be called human beings?

Second Point

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

As is stated in the First Word, a price is required for the foods a tray-bearer brings from the royal kitchen. But to look on those priceless bounties as valueless while tipping the tray-bearer, and not to recognize the one who bestowed them is the greatest foolishness.

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

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

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

Third Point

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

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

Compassion for one's fellow men is an essential part of true thankfulness.

Whoever a person is, there will always be someone poorer than himself in some respect. He is enjoined to be compassionate towards such a person. If he were not himself compelled to suffer hunger, he would be unable give the person – through compassion – the help and assistance he is obliged to offer. And even if he were able, it would be deficient, for he would not have truly experienced hunger himself.

Fourth Point

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

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

Thus, in the month of Ramadan, the instinctual soul of everyone, from the richest to the poorest, may understand that it does not own itself but is totally owned; that it is not free, but is a slave.

It understands that if it receives no command, it may not do the simplest and easiest thing; it cannot even stretch out its hand for water. Its imaginary Mastery is therefore shattered; it performs its worship and begins to offer thanks, its true duty.

Fifth Point

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

Due to its heedlessness the human soul forgets itself; it cannot see its utter powerlessness, want, and deficiency and it does not wish to see them. It does not think of just how weak it is, and how subject to transience and to disasters, nor of the fact that it consists merely of flesh and bones, which quickly decay and fall apart. Simply, it assaults the world as though it possessed a body made of steel and imagined itself to be undying and eternal. It hurls itself on the world with intense greed and voracity, and passionate attachment and love. It is captivated by anything that gives it pleasure or that profits it. Moreover, it forgets its Creator, who sustains it with perfect compassion, and does not think of the consequences of its life and its life in the hereafter. Indeed, it wallows in dissipation and misconduct.

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

Sixth Point

One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan from the point of view of the revelation of the All-Wise Qur'an, and the month of Ramadan being the most important time in its revelation, is as follows:

Since the All-Wise Qur'an was revealed in the month of Ramadan, to shun the lower demands of the soul and trivialities and to resemble the angelic state by abstaining from food and drink in order to greet that heavenly address in the best manner, is to attain to a holy state. And to read and listen to the Qur'an as though it were just revealed, to listen to the divine address in it as if it were being revealed that very instant, to listen to that address as though hearing it from Allah's Noble Messenger (Upon whom be blessings and peace), indeed, from the Angel Gabriel, or from the Pre-Eternal Speaker Himself, is to attain to that same holy state. To act in this way is to act as an interpreter and to cause others to listen to it and in some degree to demonstrate the wisdom in the Qur'an's revelation.

Indeed, it is as if the world of Islam becomes a mosque during the month of Ramadan in every corner of which millions of those who know the whole Qur'an by heart make the dwellers on the earth hear the heavenly address. Each Ramadan proclaims in luminous shining manner the verse "It was the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was bestowed from on high;" it proves that Ramadan is the month of the Qur'an. Some of the members of the vast congregation listen to the reciters with reverence, while others read it themselves.

Following the appetites of the base instinctual soul while in that sacred mosque, and quitting that luminous condition through eating and drinking is truly loathsome and makes such a person the target of the aversion and disgust of the congregation in the mosque. People who oppose those fasting during Ramadan are to

the same extent the target of the aversion and disgust of the whole world of Islam.

Seventh Point

One of the many instances of wisdom in the fast of Ramadan with respect to man's gain and profit, who comes to this world to cultivate and trade for the hereafter, is as follows:

The reward for actions in the month of Ramadan is a thousandfold. According to Hadith, each word of the All-Wise Qur'an has ten merits; each is counted as ten merits and will yield ten fruits in Paradise. While during Ramadan, each word bears not ten fruits but a thousand, and verses like Ayat al-Kursi(2:255) thousands for each word, and on Fridays in Ramadan it is even more. And on the Night of Power, each word is counted as thirty thousand merits.

Indeed, the All-Wise Qur'an, each of whose words yield thirty thousand eternal fruits, is like a luminous Tree of Tuba that gains for believers in Ramadan millions of those eternal fruits. So, come and look at this sacred, eternal profitable trade, then consider it and understand the infinite loss of those who do not appreciate the value of its words.

To put it simply, the month of Ramadan is an extremely profitable display and market for the trade of the hereafter. It is an extremely fertile piece of land for the crops of the next world. For the growth and flourishing of actions it is like April showers in the spring. It is a brilliant holy festival for the parade of mankind's worship in the face of the Sovereignty of Divine Mastery. Since it is thus, mankind has been charged with fasting in order not to heedlessly indulge the animal needs of the instinctual soul like eating and drinking, nor to indulge the appetites lustfully and in trivialities. For, by temporarily rising above animality and quitting the calls of this world man approaches the angelic state and enters upon

the trade of the hereafter. By fasting, he approaches the state of the hereafter and that of a spirit appearing in bodily form. It is as if man then becomes a sort of mirror reflecting the Eternally Besought One. Indeed, the month of Ramadan comprises and gains a permanent, eternal life in this fleeting world and brief transient life. Certainly, a single Ramadan can produce fruits equal to that of a lifetime of eighty years. The Qur'an stating that the Night of Power is more auspicious than a thousand months is a decisive proof of this.

For example, a monarch may declare certain days to be festivals during his reign, or perhaps once a year, either on his accession to the throne or on some other days that reflect a glittering manifestation of his sovereignty. On those occasions he favours his subjects, not within the compass of his laws generally but with his special bounties and favours through his unveiled presence and his wondrous activities. He favours with his especial regard and attention those of his nation who are completely loyal and worthy.

In the same way, the All-Glorious Monarch of eighteen thousand worlds, who is the Sovereign of Pre-Eternity and Post-Eternity, revealed in Ramadan the illustrious decree of the All-Wise Qur'an, which looks to the eighteen thousand worlds. It is a requirement of wisdom, then, that Ramadan should be like special divine festival, a dominical display, and a spiritual gathering. Since Ramadan is such festival, Allah has commanded man to fast, in order to disengage him to a degree from base, animal activities.

The most excellent fasting is to make the human senses and organs, such as the eyes, ears, heart, and thoughts, fast together with the stomach. That is, to withdraw them from unlawful things and from trivia, and to urge each of them to their particular worship. For example, to ban the tongue from lying, back-biting, and obscene language and to make it fast; and to busy it with such activities as reciting the Qur'an, praying, glorifying Allah's Names, asking for Allah's blessings for the Prophet Muhammad (Upon

whom be blessings and peace), and seeking forgiveness for sins; and for example, to prevent the eyes looking at members of the opposite sex outside the stipulated degrees of kinship, and the ears from hearing harmful things, and to use the eyes to take lessons and the ears to listen to the truth and to the Qur'an, is to make other organs fast too. As a matter of fact, since the stomach is the largest factory, when it has an enforced holiday from work through fasting, the other small workshops are made to follow it easily.

Eighth Point

One of the many instances of wisdom in Ramadan from the point of view of man's personal life is as follows:

It is a healing physical and spiritual diet of the most important kind. When man's instinctual soul eats and drinks just as it pleases, it is both harmful for man's physical life from the medical point of view, and when it hurls itself on everything it encounters whether licit or illicit, it quite simply poisons his spiritual life. Further, it is difficult for such a soul to obey the heart and the spirit; it wilfully takes the reins into its own hands and then man cannot ride it, it rather rides man. But by means of fasting in Ramadan, it becomes accustomed to a sort of diet. It tries to discipline itself and learns to listen to commands.

Furthermore, it will not invite illness to that miserable, weak stomach by cramming it with food before the previous consignment has been digested. And by abandoning even licit actions as it is commanded, it will acquire the ability to listen to the commands of the Shari'a and the reason, and so to avoid illicit actions. It will try not to destroy his spiritual life.

Moreover, the great majority of mankind frequently suffer from hunger. Man, therefore, needs hunger and discipline, which train him to be patient and forbearing.

Fasting in Ramadan is patient endurance of a period of hunger that continues for fifteen hours, or for twenty-four if the pre-dawn meal is not eaten, and it is a discipline and training. That is to say, fasting is also a cure for impatience and lack of endurance, which double man's afflictions.

Furthermore, the factory of the stomach has many workers, and many of the human organs are connected to it. If the instinctual soul does not take a rest from activity during the day for a month, it makes the factory's workers and those organs forget their particular duties; it busies them with itself so that they remain under its tyranny. Also, it confuses the rest of the organs in the human body with the clangour and steam of the factory's machinery. It continuously attracts their attention to itself, making them temporarily forget their exalted duties. It is because of this that for centuries those closest to Allah have accustomed themselves to discipline and to eating and drinking little in order to be perfected.

Through fasting in Ramadan the factory's workers understand that they were not created for the factory only. While the rest of the organs, instead of delighting in the lowly amusements of the factory, take pleasure in angelic and spiritual amusements, and fix their gazes on them. It is for this reason that in Ramadan the believers experience enlightenment, fruitfulness, and spiritual joys which differ according to their degrees. Their subtle faculties, such as the heart, spirit, and intellect, make great progress and advancement in that blessed month through fasting. In spite of the stomach's weeping they laugh with innocent joy.

Ninth Point

One of the instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan with regard to shattering the instinctual soul's imaginary Mastery and making known its worship through pointing out its impotence is as follows:

The instinctual soul does not want to recognize its Sustainer; it wants its own lordship, like Pharaoh. However much torment it suffers, it retains that vein.

Hunger, however, destroys it. Hence, fasting in Ramadan strikes direct blows at the soul's pharaoh-like front, shattering it. It demonstrates its impotence, weakness, and want. It makes it realize that it is a slave.

Among the narrations of Hadith is the following: "Allah Almighty said to the instinctual soul: 'What am I and what are you?' The soul replied: 'I am myself and You are Yourself.' So He punished it and cast it into Hell, then asked it again. Again it replied: 'I am myself and You are Yourself.' However He punished it, it did not give up its egoism. Finally He punished it with hunger; that is, He made it go hungry.

Then again He asked it: 'Who am I and who are you?' And the soul replied: 'You are my Compassionate Sustainer and I am your impotent slave!'"

O Allah! Grant blessings and peace to our master Muhammad that will be pleasing to You and fulfilment of his truth to the number of the merits of the words of the Qur'an in the month of Ramadan, and to his Family and Companions, and grant them peace.

Limitless in His glory is your Sustainer, the Lord of Almightyness, [exalted] above anything that men may devise by way of definition! * And peace be upon all His message-bearers. * And all praise is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of All the Worlds! (37:180-2)1

1 APOLOGY: This Second Section was written at speed when both myself and the rough-copy scribe were ill; it is bound therefore to contain disorder and defects. We await from our readers that they look on it with tolerance.

