

Ramadhan & Fasting

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In the Qu'ran, Surah Al-Baqarh 2:185), Allah Almighty tells us:

“The month of Ramadhan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion (between right and wrong).”

What is fasting?

- How does the fasting of Muslims in Ramadhan differ from the fasting of other faiths?
- Why should we 'torture' our body in such a manner?; and
- What do you really gain from fasting in the end?

These are a few questions that a number of non-Muslim friends and colleagues often ask us, thinking, why should anyone suffer from hunger and thirst like Muslims? I wouldn't be surprised if many of us shared the same negative perception of fasting.

It is important to note that Fasting in Arabic is called, "sawm", which literally means 'to be at rest'. Fasting in the month of Ramadhan is one of the five pillars upon which the "house" of Islam is built. During this month, every adult Muslim is required to fast, everyday from dawn until dusk.

Some very important facts of fasting:

- Fasting is an institution for the improvement of moral and spiritual character of human being. The purpose of the fast is to help develop self-purification, God-consciousness, the spirit of caring and sharing, the love of humanity and the love of Allah. Fasting is a universal custom and is advocated by all the religions of the world.
- Ramadhan gives us a break and provides us with a rare opportunity to think about our own selves, our future, and our families. It is a time to give our selves a mental break and to temporarily forget about the hundreds of worries and stresses we are constantly bombarded with. In hectic times, such as ours, and in places like the West, this valuable time to think about our lives, on an individual basis, is a luxury and is desperately needed! It is a unique month of self-analysis.
- Fasting reforms our patience, unselfishness, and gratitude. When we fast we feel the pains of deprivation and hunger, and learn how to endure it patiently. The meaning of this powerful experience in a social and humanitarian context is that we are much quicker than anybody else in sympathizing with the oppressed and needy around the world, and responding to their needs. "It is the month to visit the poor, the sick, and the needy to share their sorrows. It is the month where the food, sustenance and the earnings of a believing Muslim increases and they are blessed," Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says, a man who was known for his noble humanitarian causes, for social justice, and for being the first to respond to other's needs, despite the fact that he himself lived a very simple and humble life. It is only during such a trying time as Ramadan that we can reflect on the condition of those in this world who may not be as fortunate as us.
- It cultivates in us the principle of sincere Love, because when we observe fasting, we do it out of deep love for Allah. And a person, who loves Allah, truly is a person who knows what love is and why everyone on this Earth should be loved and treated justly, for the sake of Allah.
- Fasting elevates the human spirit and increases our awareness of Allah. It strengthens our will power as we learn to rise above our lower desires. The institution of fasting is both

unique and a shared experience in human history. From the very beginning of time, humans have struggled to master their physical and psychological selves: their bodies and their emotions. Hunger is one the most powerful urges that we experience. Many, through over- or under-eating or consumption of unhealthy foods, abuse this urge. Thus, when a person purposefully denies something to their own self that it craves, they are elevating their mind above their body, and their reason and will above their carnal passions. "A fasting person empties his stomach of all the material things: to fill his soul with peace and blessings, to fill his heart with love and sympathy, to fill his spirit with piety and Faith, to fill his mind with wisdom and resolution," says H. Abdalati in "Islam in Focus"¹. The person who can rule their desires and make them work, as they like, has attained true moral excellence.

- Ramadhan is a blessed month for a special reason: It is actually the month in which Allah first revealed His final message and guidance for mankind to our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This message has been perfectly preserved both orally and textually in the form of a book, called the Qur'an. Therefore, Muslims try to do an intense study of the Quran in this month especially, and evaluate their lives according to the standards and guidance contained in it.

In accordance with the practice of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, charity is also encouraged in this month and many choose this time of the year to fulfill the requirement of Zakaat². Baihaqi³ reported on the authority of Salman Al-Farsi (Radhi Allah 'Anh) that Prophet ﷺ delivered a sermon on the last day of the month of Sha'ban. The Prophet ﷺ said, "O People! The month of Ramadan has come with its mercies, blessings and forgivenesses. Allah has decreed this month the best of all months. The days of this month are the best among the days and the nights are the best among the nights and the hours during Ramadan are the best among the hours. This is a month in which you have been invited by Him (to fast and pray). Allah has honoured you in it. In every breath you take is a reward of Allah, your sleep is worship, your good deeds are accepted and your invocations are answered. Understand fully that Allah has promised in His Honour and Majesty that, people who perform salat and sajda (prostration) will be guarded from Hell-fire on the Day of Judgement. O people!, if anyone amongst you arranges for iftar (meal at sunset) for any believer, Allah will reward him as if he had freed a slave, and Allah will forgive him his sins.

A companion asked: "but not all of us have the means to do so" The Prophet ﷺ replied "Keep yourself away from Hell-fire though it may consist of half a date or even some water if you have nothing else. O people!, anyone who during this month cultivates good manners, will walk over the Sirat (bridge to Paradise) on the day when feet will tend to slip. For anyone who during this month eases the workload of his servants, Allah will make easy his accounting, and for anyone who doesn't hurt others during this month, Allah will safeguard him from His Wrath on the Day of Judgement. Anyone who respects and treats an orphan with kindness during this month, Allah shall look at him with kindness on that Day. Anyone who treats his kinsmen well during this month, Allah will bestow His Mercy on him on that Day, while anyone who mistreats his kinsmen during this month, Allah will keep away from His Mercy. Whoever offers the recommended prayers during this month, Allah will save him from Hell, and whomever observes his obligations during this month, his reward will be seventy times the reward during other months. Whomever repeatedly invokes Allah's blessings on me, Allah will keep his scale of good deeds heavy, while the scales of others will be tending to lightness. Whomever recites during this month an ayat (verse) of the Holy Qur'an, will get the reward of reciting the whole Qur'an in other months. O people!, the gates of Paradise remain open during this month. Pray to your Lord that they may not be closed for you. While the gates of Hell are closed, pray to your Lord that they never open for you. Satan has been chained, invoke your Lord not to let him dominate you."

One of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, Ali ibn Talib رضي الله عنه said: "I asked, 'O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, what are the best deeds during this month?'" 'He رضي الله عنه replied: 'O Abu-Hassan, the best of deeds during this month is to be far from what Allah has forbidden'."

1. Islam in Focus by H Abdalati
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2. Zakat is the practice of charitable giving based on accumulation of wealth. Zakat is translated from Arabic to mean "that which purifies". The giving of Zakaat is obligatory on all who are able to do so. It's considered a personal responsibility for Muslims to ease economic hardship for other Muslims and to eliminate inequality for followers in Islam.
3. Al-Baihaqi was a scholar of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), of the Shafi'i school of thought as well as hadith.
4. اللهم صل على محمد is the Arabic for Peace and Blessings be Upon You. The prayer is recited, when the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم is mentioned.
5. اللهم صل على محمد وآل محمد is the Arabic for May Allah be pleased with him. The prayer is recited when Companions of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم are mentioned as well as Islamic Scholars.

