

The blessings of Ramadhān.

The month of Ramadhān is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is a month of great virtue and superiority. Anas ibn Mālik reports that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said,

‘When the month of Ramadhān arrives, the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained [down]. Whoever cannot gain forgiveness in this month can never gain it.’ (*Tabarānī*)

This article aims to show that in its simplest form, this blessed month centres upon two fundamental elements; the Qur’ān and fasting. It is through the means of these precious gifts that Allāh creates blessings and happiness in this period.

The Qur’ān & Ramadhān.

There is a close link between the Qur’ān and the month of Ramadhān. For instance:

a. Allāh informs us that it is this month in which the Qur’ān was first revealed to the Beloved Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). In Sūrah Baqara, our Lord informs us:

‘The month of Ramadhān in which the Qur’ān was revealed, a guidance for mankind...’ (2: 185).

Furthermore, we are told of the exact night that the Qur’ān was revealed:

‘Verily We have sent down the Qur’ān on the night of Qadr.’ (97:1).

So virtuous is this occasion that Allāh decrees it better than a thousand months of worship, and the time when the angels, including Jibrīl, descend to the earth. It is worth reflecting on this fact. If the night the Qur’ān was revealed is better than a thousand months, then what will be the virtue of the night the Companion of the Qur’ān, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was born? Undoubtedly, it will be greater.

b. The Qur’ān was first revealed in Makka, in the cave of Hira. Prior to the public announcement of his Prophethood, our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would go there for seclusion, reflection and the Zikr of Allāh. He chose this particular place because he could see the Ka’ba from it.

c. The correlation between the Qur’ān and the month of Ramadhān is further shown when we remember that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would revise the entire Qur’ān with Jibrīl during this month. In other words, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would recite it to Jibrīl who would listen, and Jibrīl would recite it upon the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh

be upon him). In his last Ramadhān on earth, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) revised the whole Qur'ān with Jibrīl twice.

These three points relate to the link between the Qur'ān and Ramadhān, with particular reference to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). As for us, the importance of the Qur'ān in this month is reflected in two ways:

Salāh al-Tarāwīh.

Just like the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would revise the Qur'ān during this month, we too revise it by reciting it and hearing it in Salāh al-Tarāwīh. Implicitly, this also serves to prove that Tarāwīh consists of twenty Rak'ats and not eight. This is because we know that the Companions would recite approximately one Rukū of the Qur'ān in every Rak'at of Salāh al-Tarāwīh and would aim to finish the entire Qur'ān on the twenty-seventh night of Ramadhān. If performing eight Rak'ats was their practice, then they could only complete the entire Qur'ān if they were 216 Rukūs in the Qur'ān. But the Qur'ān consists of about 540 Rukūs.

I'tikāf.

In the same way the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would seek seclusion in the cave of Hira, we too are encouraged to sit I'tikāf in the mosque during the last ten days of Ramadhān.

Fasting and Ramadhān.

The link between fasting and Ramadhān is obvious. It is this month that Allāh has chosen for the annual obligatory fasts. There are countless reasons why Allāh has made fasting (Sawm) obligatory during the month of Ramadhān. Here are just a few:

a. Taqwa.

The primary reason for fasting, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, is so that we can adopt Taqwa (2: 183). We refrain from food and water not because we don't need or yearn from it, but purely because we know doing so is the disobedience of Allāh. So we refrain from something which is otherwise permissible during the daylight hours. Clearly therefore, refraining from those things which are forbidden anyway – lying, swearing, cheating others – is also important during the fast. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

‘Whoever does not leave the dialogue of falsity and such action, then Allāh does not require him to leave food and water for His sake.’ (*Bukhārī*)

b. Patience.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said that ‘fasting is half of patience.’ We have patience during the day and we are rewarded with Iftār. We fast during the entire month and we are then rewarded with Eid. Likewise, we spend a lifetime in the obedience of Allāh and are rewarded with Paradise. But with all cases, the effort comes first and then the reward.

c. An antidote to greed.

In his Duās, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) used to seek refuge from a ‘heart that is never satisfied’. After eleven months of demanding and expecting more, Ramadhān teaches us to suffice on less.

d. Appreciation of Allāh’s favours.

We only truly appreciate light in the darkness of the night. We only appreciate the value of health when we are ill. Likewise, we only appreciate the value of food and water when we are deprived of it.

What is the result of observing Ramadhān correctly?

a. The physical benefits of fasting.

Allāh has created our body and for it to function properly, Allāh has given us guidance in the form of Shariah rules. If we follow these rules correctly, then we will enjoy perfect health and lead a quality life.

So by fasting, not only do we get a reward from Allāh, but also we get countless medical benefits. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said: ‘Keep fasts and [as a result of doing so] become healthy.’

Fasting affects our bodily systems in a positive manner. First of all, Fasting reduces our overall intake of calories (by eating less food). This reduced caloric intake in turn leads to some general benefits: These include the reduced risk of cancer, reduced risk of heart diseases, reduced risk of diabetes and reduced risk of obesity. In addition to this it fasting improves our immune System and slows down the ageing process.

There are also some specific medical benefits of fasting. For example:

- Improved Lipid Profile which then reduces bad cholesterol.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Lowering of blood sugar levels – ideal for type 2 Diabetics.
- Fasting has also been found to help with allergic conditions, arthritis, digestive disorders and skin conditions.

Fasting also helps healing. When we get ill, we lose our appetite. Why? To recover from an illness, our body needs energy to kill the germs, to get rid of the dead tissue and to regenerate new tissue.

But surprisingly, rather than eating more – during a major illness – we lose our appetite. This is a natural response. In fact, from the food we eat, we can only obtain energy from it once it has been digested and absorbed in our gut. This process of digestion & absorption itself requires energy.

An average man requires up to 1500 calories per day for the normal functioning of the body. Up to 130-200 calories are used to digest & absorb an average meal. So overall with every meal, up to 20% of our caloric intake is used to digest & absorb food. When we fast – by resting our digestive system– we are saving on this 20% energy and we are then using it to heal and recuperate our body. This freed up energy is then directed towards detox, repair of cells, tissues & organs. This is what leads to better health overall and good quality of life.

However, we sometimes see the opposite of this during Ramadhān. We observe that people begin to fall ill at the start of Ramadhān. During Tarāwih Salāh, we hear people coughing constantly. Many will get flu, headache, chest infections or viral illness during Ramadhān.

The reality is that this is due to our shortcomings, not because of the nature of fasts. Fasting will not make anyone ill. However, it is our food intake – and more importantly type of food we eat – that makes us ill. Unfortunately these days we have a boom of food culture. Even non-Muslims seem to have realised that Muslims tend to eat a great deal during Ramadhān.

If we analyse our menu, then a typical family during Ramadhān will prepare for Iftaar with items such as dates, fizzy drinks, sharbat, pakoras, samosas, chutney, fruit chaat, roti, biryani, curry, sweet dish and tea. In fact, we end up loading our body with more food during Ramadhān than in other months. This is why we fall ill.

We will only gain the true blessings of fasting when we are feeling the hunger, when we are feeling the thirst and our lips are dry from dehydration.

b. Increased social unity.

Allāh has not made any of the other major worships specific to an exact time. Salāh is compulsory, but it is up to us when we perform it. Zakāh is incumbent upon us annually, but it is up to us when we pay it. Quite deliberately, Allāh has fasting compulsory upon all of us at the same time, in the month of Ramadhān. The reason is so that we can help and assist one another in this worship. This then increases social unity.

Moreover, Sadaqa al-Fitr aims to ensure that all Muslim can enjoy Eid, especially the poor and needy. Eid Salāh has to be performed by all male adults, preferably in one place. We are told of the great reward of providing Iftār to someone. All aim to increase social unity and brotherhood.

c. The effects after Ramadhān.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

‘Whosoever keeps the fast of Ramadhān and follows it with six from Shawwāl, then it is as if he has fasted the entire year.’

Implicitly, the Prophet is asking us to ensure the good acts performed during the month of Ramadhān continue after it too. Islam orders piety at all times, not just during Ramadhān. We should refrain from swearing at all times, not just when we are fasting.

Conclusion.

In short, Ramadhān is about two things, fasting and the Qur'ān. If we respect these two during this period, then it will lead to spiritual and physical well-being. As for the hereafter, there is a special reward. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

‘Fasting and the Qur'ān perform intercession for the servant on the Day of Judgement. Fasting will say: ‘O Lord! I prevented him from eating and his desires so please accept my intercession for him.’ And the Qur'ān will say: ‘O Lord! I prevented him from sleeping at night so please accept my intercession for him.’ The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said: ‘So their intercession will be accepted.’ (*Musnad Ahmad*)

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