

RAMAZAN:

THE MONTH OF SELF-PURIFICATION

— S. Ali Imam Zaidi

Holy Qur'an says, "O' you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil)"¹

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "Keep fast for your health".

The lunar calendar of Islam brings the fast of the month of Ramazan eleven days earlier every year. Thus, in a cycle of about thirty-three years, it passes through all the seasons.

In Islam, the spiritual, social, economic, political and psychological benefits of the fast are interrelated, each affecting the other. Rituals regulate the Muslim's social and individual life and bring them closer to their Creator. A combination of fast, prayers and meditation may be the very best dose for any and all psychological, financial and spiritual ills from which one may be suffering. *They purify the soul, cleanse the intention, and bring about an abundance of good from the Almighty Who is ever-watching over us and Who desires nothing but good for His sincere servants.*

During the month of Ramazan, the believers learn to curb their desires and check them against transgression, extravagance and yielding to the lower desires, all of which degenerate man and bring him to the pit of self-destruction and annihilation. Fast fosters a strong will, teaches

patience and self-discipline, the ability to bear hardship and tolerate hunger and thirst. In short, it brings about a clear victory over one's illicit desires and selfish impulses. It regulates, systemizes and energizes the instincts. It trains the body to submit to lofty spiritual impulses. *Fast safeguards the body's health by protecting it against extravagance. It grants its organs a respite so that they may be ready to resume their activities. As medical science has proved, fast is a medicine for many bodily and nervous ailments. It is a moral education, a nourishment of supreme virtues. It teaches the believer to abandon vices, to control emotions and instincts to curb the tongue against saying what is wrong or inappropriate and the conscience against contemplating upon wrong doing or subversion. It promotes the spirit of unity among members of the fasting community; it teaches them humility and humbleness and instills within them the feeling of equality before Allah. The rich have to observe it as well as the poor, the women as*

well as the men, the influential and powerful as well as the weak and downtrodden; they all have to observe the fast and its rules and regulations. The month of Ramazan promotes the spirit of charity and compassion towards the poor and the needy, and it reminds each believer of the needs of other believers.

Islam places a great deal of emphasis on moral excellence during this holy month. The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) has said, "One who, while fasting, neither guards his tongue from telling lies nor refrains from doing bad deeds does not respect his fast, while Allah does not approve of mere abstention from food.... When you fast, you should not speak ill of anybody, nor should you be boisterous or noisy. If anybody speaks ill of you or tries to pick a quarrel with you, do not respond to him in the same manner; rather, simply tell him that you are fasting".²

The institute of the fast is one of the signs of the Almighty's mercy on those who adhere to His divine creed, and it is never meant to put a hardship on anybody. The Almighty does not

gain any benefit from putting hardship on anyone; on the contrary, He always tries to pave the way of happiness for His servants in this life and in the life to come, and sometimes He even "pushes" them to do what is good for them, as is the case with making the fast of the month of Ramazan obligatory on every believing man and woman. But if you afford this great month a sincere and profound welcome, you will receive your rewards in many, many ways both in the short life of this fleeting world and in the eternal abode.

EFFECTS OF FASTING

Fast effects our life in many ways, although the discussion here is restricted to the primary three effects.

1) Freedom from the power of habits

Habits have power over people and authority over their hearts. They take root until they become a natural thing which a person cannot get rid of, nor can he abandon them. Many people among us are enslaved by our habit in eating, drinking, sleeping and waking, and we are not able to leave them or get rid of their control. They are habits connected with food, its varieties, taking tea, sweets, smoking tobacco etc., as well as habits regarding sleeping and habits regarding work and so on.

Fasting is an effective cure for these usual habits. It trains persons to get rid of them, and be free from their hold and demands. It also draws the attention of men to the fact that these habits are not natural things from which one cannot

escape. Rather these are things he has imposed upon himself, or they have been imposed upon him by circumstances without his having any choice. He, therefore, can abandon them and free himself from their domination if only he can show determination and firm resolve.³

If a person tries in the month of fasting and conditions himself in practical terms, he will definitely acquire a new quality, that is the quality of true determination to get rid of any such thing which is harmful and brings no benefit to him. From his struggle to give up the habits related to food and drink he can move on to resist and fight other habits of his life as well as self made customs of the society which are harmful.

*"O' you who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil)"*⁴

2) Endurance

The Second effect of fasting is that it makes a man accustomed to endurance. Endurance is the noblest character and the essence of human virtues. The *Holy Qur'an* has attached importance to it, and urged people to adopt it from many of its chapters and verses. It is also said that endurance is half of faith, and fasting is half of endurance. Allah the Most High grants the reward of every good deed, and increases the reward of whosoever He wishes, but when He spoke about the reward of people who endure He said: *"The people who endure shall receive their rewards in full without measure,"*⁵

Fasting is the training and coaching for endurance. The fasting person abandons his food, his drink and all that he desires. He sees with his own eyes the pleasures of the table and other things which he has been asked to forsake, but controls himself in fulfilment of the Commands of Allah and resorts to endurance having hope in the reward of Allah. If he is confronted by misbehaviour or abuse from someone he does not get angry, and does not respond with a similar action. He is not even disturbed, as though he is saying to the other person, "Do whatever you want, I have made a covenant with Allah by my fast that I will preserve my tongue and my limbs. How can I then breach the covenant and respond to you or act with evil towards you as you have done?" "If you stretch your hand towards me to kill me I shall never stretch my hand towards you to kill you, surely I fear Allah, the Lord of the worlds."⁶

The fasting person who is expecting a reward from Allah knows very well that fasting is a trust.

*"Allah commands you that you render back the trust to their owners,"*⁷

The fasting person who is expecting reward does not feel any inconvenience nor discomfort in his heart, but on the contrary he is satisfied, content and comfortable. His body may feel weak, but his spirit is high and active. The sincere fasting person is not angered in Ramazan by things which anger him at other times. He does not get bored by matters which bore him when he is not fasting. All this

happens because his fast is for Allah, his endurance is by Allah, and his reward is upon Allah.

3) Religious deterrent

Another impact of the fast is that it inculcates the fear and sense of being watched by Allah in the open and in secret. The fasting person feels that he is a trustee and has the duty of observing his actions whether big or small. He fully realises the fear of his Lord and His Observation of his actions.

There is an issue here that the reformers and leaders and rulers of nations are required to pay heed to, and this is that religious deterrent works in the hearts of the people more effectively than the deterrent of power and authority. When a person is used to listening to his conscience, being aware of his Lord and fearing His Punishment, society will be safe from his destructive acts and secure from his evil deeds. However, if one depends entirely on the authorities and the law for enforcement then it should be remembered that people in authority are sometimes careless and the law is interpreted so that loopholes exist to exclude its application. That is why where there is a lack of religious education crimes and evil deeds abound.

It is, therefore, our duty as custodians of peace and patrons of order and stability to take measures to discipline the people with the method prescribed by religion and virtue so that we may find peace and spare the efforts which are wasted on useless ends. The observation of Allah's Commands is a strong

safeguard which bars a man from thinking about crimes and evil doings. Perhaps this is the meaning of what the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) is reported to have said: "When Ramazan comes the Gates of Paradise are opened, the Gates of Hell are shut, and devils are put in chains."

Islam as the last revealed religion on this earth aims, through its teachings, to maintain a balance between the material and the spiritual aspects of human beings. It commands that the body be given its full share of worldly pleasures, but efforts must be made to restrict its greed and capacity. Human beings must strive hard to link themselves with the Divine.

All obligatory duties in Islam aim to achieve this goal, but fasting is prominent among them in this respect. Fasting keeps a person away from food and drink, and all other prohibited activities, and by this lifts him above the level of animals.

It creates in him a strong will-power and resolve to do things that are good and beneficial. He sees edible and drinkable things before him and can consume them without being noticed, but he listens to his conscience. His faith reminds him that there is a Being from Whom nothing is hidden.

References:

1. Holy Qur'an (2:182)
2. Fast of the month of Ramazan Philosophy and Ahkam
3. The Straight Path-UK, Jan'97
4. Holy Qur'an (2:182)
5. Holy Qur'an (39:10)
6. Holy Qur'an (5:28)
7. Holy Qur'an (4:58)

GIVE YOUR CHILD A GOOD NAME

— S. Ali Imam Zaidi

Hazrat 'Ali (A.S.) said: "The first beneficence of a parent towards his child is to give him a good name; therefore, you should name your child with a good name".

It is a fact that good names may have a good influence on the mind of a person. A child hears his name day and night; and it is reasonable to believe that the meaning of that name subconsciously strengthens those characteristics which are implied in that name. Of course, it does not mean that no evil person has a good name. What is emphasised here is the fact that a name has psychological effect on the person.

A bad name has one more tangible evil effect. Whenever that name is announced, the person will feel embarrassment and the name will become a source of constant irritation, effecting his outlook of society. Hence, there is much emphasis in hadis on giving good names to children.

The Holy Prophet used to emphasise this aspect of life so much and used to change the bad names of people and places.

It is recommended that the child be named after the Holy Prophet and his holy family.

Nowadays people name their children after film actors and actresses. This trend shows that now our daily life and its dominating thoughts have lost their connection with the founder of Islam, his family and friends. By giving our children the names of such anti-Islamic persons, we are teaching our children not to care about Islam in their lives. Such an attitude must be given up.

