

Fasting: A Divine Feast and Hospitality

BY: AL-BALAGH FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds, and blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammed, his infallible progeny and the righteous among his companions.

The Almighty, never promulgates any law unless there is a great purpose behind it in serving the interests of mankind, guiding them along the sublime path of piety and towards the lofty heights of perfection.

He, the Exalted sent messengers and prophets as blessings to the humankind, to take them out of the labyrinths of uncertainty and aimlessness, guide them to the right path, and inspire in them a virtuous life, which ultimately will be of benefit in the world to come. Allah did not forbid mankind from anything except what might bring certain harm; and He did not enjoin anything except that which is of benefit both in this present world and the hereafter.

As part of His unbounded grace, the All-wise has enjoined the month of fasting as an obligation on all those who profess to be Muslims. Hence, fasting Ramadhan could very well be described as Allah's banquet. It is among the wonderful aspects of Islam which build human character and personality, and help mould social life.

A Muslim while fasting experiences the aesthetic pleasure of Allah's proximity and the joy of divine blessings. The feeling thus instills the will in the believers to lead a life of content, filled with Allah's remembrance and ever responsive to His command.

A Muslim who fasts experiences feelings of great spirituality and a profound sense of exaltation. He is sure of himself and is confident of moving towards perfection, because he consciously musters all his senses to direct his powerful will to serve and please his Creator.

Fasting is not confined to one's inner self alone but also has its social effects in influencing the community as an integrated whole. A fasting community enjoys all the comforts and pleasures resulting from obedience to the Almighty. The society consequently consolidates itself directing its energies towards constructive public welfare. The members of such a society feel a sense of responsibility towards each other, characterized by mutual cooperation and kindness. It is a society almost free of crime, jealousy and hatred. A society which asserts its supremacy over the mundane world of matter, and feels proud of its adherence to spiritual values.

Fasting, therefore, is a duty of many-fold benefits. One of its significant effects is that it strengthens in the individual and society the will to resist temptation and defy the forces of evil, injustice and deviation. A believer's soul, having tasted the pleasures of fasting, will never submit to other than Allah, and will never entertain the idea of worshipping other than Him.

Al-Balagh Foundation in presenting this booklet on fasting seeks to perform its duty of inviting people to Allah and proclaiming His eternal message. It hopes the booklet will be of benefit to our dear readers whose enthusiasm has been a source of inspiration for us.

We humbly implore Allah, the Most Exalted to guide the Ummah along the blessed path of Islam, and to accept the selfless deeds of fasting Muslims. He is the Most Excellent Patron, the Most Excellent Helper.

AL-BALAGH FOUNDATION

THE PROPHET'S SERMON ON THE ADVENT OF RAMADHAN

As we said before, holy Ramadhan is Allah's Banquet, spread out for all His creatures without the difference of class, caste, rank, race, language or geographical barriers. It is not just a month of mere rituals, as some may misbelieve, but on the contrary signifies the very peak of spiritual purification, which Islam has perfected;

The word Ramadhan is derived from the root ramadh which indicates heat' and restlessness', and is said to signify the hardships of a fast, like thirst for example. A hadith from the Prophet says, Ramadhan burns the sins and the faults as fire burns wood.

Before discussing further the spiritual and physical dynamism of fasting, let's start with those eternal words of Allah's last and greatest Prophet, which continue to ring even today in the ears of the believers.

Imam Ali bn Musa ar-Ridha (a.s.)* relates on the chain of authority of his illustrious forefathers from Lmam Au (a.s.) that once on the advent of Ramadhan, Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)* delivered the following sermon:

أيها الناس انه قد اقبل اليكم شهر الله بالبركة والرحمة والمغفرة , شهر هو عند الله أفضل الشهور, وأيامه أفضل الايام , ولياليه أفضل الليالي, وساعاته أفضل الساعات ... وهو شهر دعيتم فيه الى ضيافة الله , وجعلتم فيهمن أهل كرامة الله , أنفاسكم فيه تسبيح , ونومكم فيه عبادة وعملكم فيه مقبول , ودعاؤكم فيه مستجاب , فاسألوا الله ربكم بنيات صادقة , وقلوب طاهرة , ان يوفقكم لصيامه وتلاوة كتابه , فان الشقي من حرم غفران الله في هذا الشهر العظيم , واذكروا بجوعكم وعطشكم فيه جوع يوم القيامة وعشه , وتصدقوا على فقرائكم ومساكينكم , ووقروا كباركم , وارحموا صغاركم , وصلوا ارحامكم , واحفظوا الاستكم , وغضوا عما لا يحل النظر اليه أبصاركم , وعما لا يحل الاستماع اليه السماعكم , وتحننوا على أيتام الناس يتحنن على أيتامكم , وتوبوا الى الله من ذنوبكم , وارفعوا اليه ايديكم بالدعاء في أوقات صلاتكم فانها أفضل الساعات , ينظر الله عز وجل فيها بالرحمة العباده , ... يجيبهم اذا ناجوه , ويلبيهم اذا نادوه , ويعطيهم اذا سألوه , ويستجيب لهم اذا دعوا

أيها الناس ان انفسكم مرهونة باعمالكم , ففكوها باستغفاركم , وظهوركم ثقيلة من أوزاركم , فحففوا عنها بطول سجودكم , واعلموا ان الله اقسم بعزته ان لا يعذب المصلين والساجدين , وان لا يروعهم بالنار يوم يقوم الناس لرب العالمين

* (a. s.) stands for: alayhi / alayha / alayhim as-salaam (peace be upon him/her/they).

* (saw.) stands for: sal-lallahu alayhi wa alihi wasallam (may Allah shower His blessings on him and his progeny).

أيها الناس من فطرنكم صائما مؤمنا في هذا الشهر كانله بذلك عند الله عتق رقبة, ومغفرة لمامضى من ذنوبه, قيل: يارسول الله, فليس كلنا نقدر على ذلك, فقال (ص) ((اتقوا النار, ولو بشق تمرة, اتقوا النار, ولو بشربة من ماء

"O People! the month (Ramadhawt) of Allah has come with His mercies, blessings and forgiveness. Allah has decreed this month the best of all months. its days are the best among the days, its nights are the best among the nights and its hours are the best among the hours. This is a month in which you have been invited by Him (to fast and to pray). Allah has honoured you in it. in it, every breath you take is (has the reward af) Tasbih' (the praise of Allah), your sleep is worship, your good deeds are accepted and your invocations answered."

"Therefore, you must invoke your Lord in right earnest with hearts that are free from sin and evil, and pray that Allah may help you to keep fasts, and to recite the Holy Qur'an. Indeed! miserable is the one who is deprived of Allah's forgiveness in this great month. While fasting, remember the hunger and thirst on the Day of Judgement. Give alms to the poor and the needy. Pay respect to your elders, have sympathy for your youngsters and be kind towards your relatives and kinsmen. Guard your tongue against unworthy words, and your eyes from scenes that are hot worth seeing (forbidden) and your ears from sounds that should not be heard."

"Be kind to orphans so that if your children become orphans they will also be treated with kindness. Do repent to Allah for your sins and supplicate with raised hands at the times of prayer as these are the best times, during which Almighty Allah looks at His servants with mercy, (He) Answers if they supplicate, Responds if they call, Grants if they ask, and Accepts if they entreat."

"O people! you have made your conscience the slave of your desires. Make it free, by invoking Him for forgiveness. Your back is breaking under the heavy load of your sins, so prostrate yourself before Him for long intervals and make it lighter."

"Do understand fully well that Allah has promised in the name of His Majesty and Honour that He will not take to task such people who perform Salaat and Sajda (prostration), and that He will guard their bodies against the fire of hell on the Day of Judgement."

"O people! if anybody amongst you arranges for the :ftar (food for ending of fast at sunset) of way believers, then Allah will give him the reward as if he had set free a slave, and He will forgive his previous sins."

Then the companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.) asked,

"But everybody amongst us does not have the means to do so."

The Prophet replied:

"Keep yourself away from the fire of hell, though it may consist of only half a date or even some water ~f you have nothing else."

"O people! anybody who in this month cultivates good manners, will walk over the Sirat (bridge leading to Paradise) on the day when feet will tend to slip."

"Anybody who in this month may take light work from his servants, Allah will make easy his accounting, and anybody who does not annoy others in it, Allah will keep him safe from His wrath on the Day of Judgement. Anybody who respects and treats an orphan with kindness in it, Allah shall look at him with kindness on that Day."

"Anybody who treats well his kinsmen in it, Allah will bestow His Mercy on him on the Day of Judgement, while anybody who ma/treats his kinsmen in it, Allah will keep him away from His Mercy."

"Whoever offers recommended prayers in it, Allah will save him from hell, and whoever observes in it obligatories, his reward will be that of seventy such obligatories that were observed in other months."

"Whoever recites repeatedly blessings (Salawat) on me in it Allah will keep the scales of his good deeds heavy (on Judgement Day) whilst the scales of others will be tending to lightness. Whoever recites in this month, an Aya (verse) of the Holy Qur'an, his reward will be that of reciting the whole Qur'an in other months."

"O people! the gates of Paradise remain open in this month. Do pray to your Lord that they may not be closed for you. While the gates of Hell are closed, do pray to your Lord they may never be opened for you. Satans have been handcuffed, invoke your Lord ntt to let them dominate you."

Amir AI-Mu'mineen Au (a.s.) said :

"I asked, O Messenger of Allah, what is the best of deeds in this month?' He replied: O Abu'l Hassan, the best of deeds in this month is to be far from what Allah has forbidden."*

* Shi eikh Saduq - Uyun Akhbar ar-Rid/ia.

FASTING - WORSHIP

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those that were before you, so that you may be godfearing. (Fast) A certain number of days. But whoever of you is sick or on a journey, then (he shall fast) the (same) number of other days and for those who are able (with hardship to fast) a redemption by feeding a needy poor person. But whoever volunteers to do good it is better for him; and to fast is better for you, if you know. The month of Ramadhan in which the Qur'an was sent down to be a guidance for mankind and as clear signs of guidance and a criterion (between right and wrong). Therefore, whoever of you is present at the month, fast it; and whoever is sick, or on a journey, then (fast) the (same) number of other days; Allah desires ease for you, and desires not hardship for you; so that you should complete the number (of days decreed), and exalt Allah for His guiding you, so that you might be thankful.”

Holy Qur'an (2 :183 - 185)

A DEFINITION OF FASTING

Originally, in Arabic the word as-sawm meant al-Jmsak i.e. to abstain totally from any act including eating, drinking, walking, speaking etc. Thus, the Arabs used to refer to 'a horse refusing to run or to be fed, as!a'im i.e. fasting.

As is clear the word sawm is ancient and was used in a different context by the Arabs before Islam. Then, however it did not have the specific meaning given to it by Islam as a term denoting a certain religious obligation.

As an Islamic term, it means to refrain intentionally from what breaks fasting. *

To a Muslim, fasting is not just refraining from eating and drinking but carries the added significance of worship, psychological comfort, morality and legislation. It is neither the irrational motionless Imsak of pre-Islamic Arabs nor the mere abstaining from eating and drinking, but is in fact the building of one's character, control over desires, and an inspiration towards social and scientific creativity.

Allah has commanded this sanctified duty and enjoined it on the Muslims, as He had enjoined it on the believing nations before. He assigned the blessed month, the month of Ramadhan, for every adult and healthy Muslim as a period of fasting.

This sacred ordinance was prescribed by Allah, the Exalted for all believers and revealed in the preceding month of Sha'ban, nearly a year and a half after the Hijrah.*

Gradually, the Almighty revealed numerous other verses about the month of Ramadhan and the rules of fasting. In the light of these divine injunctions, the Prophet expounded the merits of fasting, its significance, regulations, effects, benefits and great reward.

Hence, Fasting is one of the pillars of Islam, and a religious duty for all those who believe in Monotheism, and consequently whoever denies it is a disbeliever.

It is an apparent sign of obedience, submission and servitude to Allah, the Exalted. By fasting, a Muslim expresses his submission to Allah's command, his response to His will, and the control over his own desires and wishes, at the Almighty's behest. In Ramadhan a Muslim's abstaining from food, drink, sexual intercourse, etc. during the prescribed hours, is the very manifestation of the creatures' obedience to the Creator's Will. This self-deprivation represents a state of self-control, and of overcoming carnal pleasure, desire and enjoyment, for the blissful love of Allah, His proximity, and the eagerness to obtain His consent. It is a triumph of pristine love over one's desires and wants. It characterizes the control over transient pleasures for the eternal ones promised by the Almighty.

This response to divine commandments represents and incarnates true servitude, and is a brilliant display of spirit, intellect and decisive will power.

By fasting, a person keeps himself away from the pleasures of life, with no preventive or hindrance factor, except that of obeying Allah and showing genuine devotion to His commands. A hadith succinctly explains this fact : "A fasting person is in a state of worship, even when (asleep) in bed, except when he backbites wvther Muslim."*

"... Every breath you take is (has the reward of) Tasbih (praise to Allah) and your sleep in worship..." *

In a moving speech, the Messenger of Allah describes the believing soul that fasts for love of Allah out of truthfulness and sincerity, and thus the whole day becomes an altar of worship, and each and every activity of the fasting body, provided it abstains from loathsome acts, is nothing but worship embodied. The Prophet describes the sleep of a fasting Muslim, even the very breathing to be acts of worship, because they emanate from a body regarded as being in continual worship through abstaining from tasting delicious and lawful things, solely out of obedience to the Creator.

The Almighty Himself extols fasting and attributes it as a special blessing for mankind as is clear from a hadith Qudsi.

The Prophet said:

"Allah, the Exalted says: Fasting is (exclusively) for Me and I will reward it."

The eighth Imam, Au ibn Musa ar-Ridha (a.s.) quotes his ancestor the Prophet on the chain of authority of his noble forefathers:

"O people, anybody who a, this month cultivates good manners will walk over the Sirat (bridge to Paradise) on the day when feet will tend to slip... "*"

* Shi eikh Saduq - Uyun Akhbar ar-Rid/ia.

* Mohaqqiq al-Hilli, Shara'e al-Islam.

* The Prophet's auspicious migration to Medina, (622 AC.) ivhich marks the start of the Islamic calendar. * Al-Kulayni, al-Fni mm al-Kafi. vol. 4, The Book of Fasting. p. 190/3rd edition.

* Prophet's Sermon - Uvun Akhbar ar-Ridha.

* ibid

FASTING - EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REFORM

All obligatory acts ordained by Allah, the Exalted such as Fasting, Prayer, Hajj (pilgrimage) Zakat (poor-tax) etc., are not mere rituals as some are bound to misinterpret, but are an elaborate form of spiritual, psychological, physical and social education. Besides being a form of worship and a means by which the Muslim displays his submission to his Creator, they play a vital role in reforming and developing the soul and personality of an individual which in turn positively affects the society as an integrated whole.

The purpose behind fasting was not just to prevent eating, drinking and sexual intercourse during the prescribed hours but to i~frain from all acts injurious to one's self and fellow humans so as to help build a virtuous and progressive society. A narration from the Prophet says:

"The easiest duty enjoined by Allah on a fasting person is to forego food and drink. " *

Thus, fasting has two evolutionary aims. The first is to protect a person from all forbidden acts such as backbiting, calumny, envy, lying, vain discourses and the like. And the second is to encourage and enhance the moral and spiritual level by such recommended deeds as reciting the Holy Qur'an, giving alms, meditating on one's past life and a more righteous future course, remembering Allah's favours and greatness, helping fellow-humans and the doing of various other good that benefits the self and the society.

Fasting, therefore is an institution designed for educating the soul and casting it in an Islamic evolutionary mould.

There are numerous Hadiths which guide a fasting Muslim towards divine bliss. Imam Ali ibn Abi-Talib (a.s.), quoting his cousin the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), says:

"Whoever fasts during the month of Ramadhan out of faith and seeking Allah's pleasure and guards his ears, eyes and tongue from harming people, Allah will accept his fasting, forgive his past sins...,*"

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) relates the Prophet's advice to Jabir ibn Abdullah:

"o Jabir, whoever, fasts the days of Ratnadh an, stands for prayers in parts of its nights, guards his/her sexual desires, reins in his/her tongue, lowers his/her gaze and injures, not the feelings of others, will become free of sins as on the day he/she was born." *

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), on the authority of his illustrious forefathers, quotes his noble ancestor Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) as follows:

"If a fasting person when abused, replies peace be upon you I will not abuse as you do, the Lord, the Exalted and Most High, says, By fasting, My servant has saved himself from the evil of My (other) servant, I grant him refuge against the fire." *

* Al-Hur al-Amili. Wasa El ash-S h'a, vol. 4. ,4bwab ,4dab as-Sawm.

* Ahmad i bn Han bal and the compilers of Sunan have narrated the above with slight difference.

* Sheikh Saduq. Thawab aL-AmaL p. 88.

* aI-Kafi. a1-Kulayni.

“.. Once the Prophet heard a fasting woman abusing her maidservant. He ordered some food and told her to eat'. lam fasting', she said. He replied Can you be considered fasting when you have just abused your maid. (Beware) Fasting does not mean only to abstain from(mere)eating and drinking'.” *

What follows is an advice from Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (a.s.) to a fasting Muslim:

"When you fast, guard your hearing and sight against the forbidden, and your limbs and all other organs from the vile. Do not rm'e at or injure a sen'ant. Be dignified as a fasting person should, and keep silent and calm, except when remembering Allah. Do not regard your fasting day as an ordinary day and refrain from intercourse, kissing and loud laughter, because Allah dislikes that.” *

The Prophet says:

“Whoever backbites his Muslim brothers, his fasting will be invalid* and his ablution null. Should he die it, such a state, he will die like the one who decreed lawful what Allah has forbidden.” *

Such, therefore, are the lofty ethics, fasting persons are exhorted to observe, as Ramadhan is a month for worship and for reforming one's self.

As is clear the objectives of the great reformative duty called fasting cannot be fulfilled except by adhering to these lofty morals and ethics. If not, the act will turn out to be an exercise in futility with the fasting person gaining nothing except the pangs of hunger and thirst.

Islam strives to reform both the individual and the society, and the starting point for this healthy transformation is the human soul. If the human soul reaches perfection and moulds itself according to the dynamic principles of Islam, then society will be reformed accordingly.

How wonderfully the Glorious Qur'an confirms this fact:

“...Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition;...”

Holy Qur'an (13 :11)

Ramadhan, the month of Allah affords us this chance for meditation and social reform. It is for us to seize this wonderful opportunity to repent, reflect over our past deeds, seek the Almighty's forgiveness and strive towards perfection, in morals and behaviour.

Fasting has remarkable benefits. It not only refines an individual's conduct by instilling virtue, but also has similar impacts on the interest of the Islamic society as a whole. Because once a group of individuals acquires honesty, integrity, intellect and other lofty morals, their desire for reform and to refrain from all things perverse positively affects the march of the society.

* ibid.

* Wasa'il ash-Shia. al-Hur al-Amili.

* Backbiting does not make the fast void but since it is a sin it negates the re)lard a fasting person deserves.

* Waco ii asjz-Shi'a al-Hur al-,4mili. vol. 4, ,4bwab ,ldab cs-Sawm.

Islam looks at the human being from two angles; as an independent individual, and as a part of a society affecting society and being influenced by it in turn. Consequently, all the rules, laws, regulations, morals and ethics conveyed through the message of Islam deal with the human being both as an independent entity and as part of an integrated whole.

Such being the case, these moral, social, economic and devotional aspects will certainly have political consequences as well because an individual's daily activities are interrelated and effect each other.

Thus, fasting could without doubt be considered as a great educational experience, because faith in Allah and the Day of Judgement has a profound influence not only on devotional and moral aspects but also in the economic and political spheres. So great is the reciprocal dynamism of these factors that if sincerely observed they hold the key to the perfection, bliss and harmony of both the individual and the society.

Narratives reaching us from Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w.) Ahl-ul-Bait, wonderfully explain these facts.

How beautifully the eighth Imam of the Prophet's progeny All ibn Musa ar-Ridha (a.s.) expounds the philosophy of fasting, as a blessing from the Almighty, so that one becomes aware of the hardships of the poor and the needy and quite naturally feels obliged to pay out of what Allah has granted us. Moreover, he says. that by realizing the pangs of hunger and thirst one becomes aware of the Day of Resurrection when people will have to stand for timeless hours waiting their turn to be judged. In short, concludes the Imam, fasting builds up personality because the restraint over desires helps us acquire the virtues of modesty, self- control, humbleness of character, hope, kindness, generosity, forbearance etc..

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) has been quoted as saying:

"Allah made fasting incumbent to make equity between the rich and the poor. A rich man does not feel the pains of hunger to have mercy for the poor, since he is able to obtain whatever he likes. (By enjoining fasting) Allah wanted to put His creatures on an equal footing by making the rich taste the pain of hunger, so that he may pity the weak and have mercy on the hungry..." *

Therefore, fasting is an all-compassing education whose social, spiritual, hygienic, economic and various other dimensions which if properly observed guarantee blissful harmony for the human race.

FASTING - KEY TO A GOOD HEALTH

Fasting also has its advantages from the point of view of health and hygiene. Islam wants a Muslim to be healthy, clean, alert, agile and energetic.

"Fast to be healthy" had said the Prophet. And physicians today acknowledge the many benefits of fasting that ensure health and the soundness of one's body and mind. Some of these positive points have a direct influence on psychology and physique of the fasting individual.

* TVasa'i'l aS/i-Shju. aI-Hur aI-Amili.

Fasting has been found to be an effective treatment for psychological and emotional disorders. It helps a person to firm up his will, cultivate and refine his taste and manners, strengthen his conviction of doing good, avoid controversy, petulance and rashness, which all contribute towards a sane and healthy personality. Besides nurturing resistance and ability to face hardships and endurance, fasting reflects on outward physical appearance by cutting out gluttony and getting rid of excess fat.

The benefits of fasting on health do not stop there but are instrumental in alleviating a number of physical diseases, including those of the digestive systems, such as chronic stomach ache, inflammation of the colon, liver diseases, indigestion, and conditions such as obesity, arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, asthma, diphtheria and many other maladies.

A Swiss physician Dr. Barsilus noted that: The advantages of hunger as a remedy exceed those ingesting medicine several times.

As readers are well aware, several physicians advise patients to skip meals, sometimes for a few days, before prescribing them a controlled diet.

Generally speaking, fasting hastens the destruction of the decaying tissues of the body by means of hunger, and then builds new tissues through nutrition. This is why some scientists suggest that fasting should be regarded as an effective means of restoring youthfulness and longevity. However, Islam exempts from fasting sick and old people whose health is bound to deter.

But fasting should have its regulations too, and not simply the unordered skipping of meals, that is bound to harm health and stamina, rather than improving them. Here again Islam provides the answer, and in order to realize the benefits of fasting it recommends the late midnight meals called

Sohour (before the formal start of a fast) and the breaking of the fast at the time prescribed. Of course to ensure good health one should abstain from gluttony after breaking fast. *

* Medicine in the Glorious Qur'an. Dr. .Ibdul-l-Iatnid Diyab and Dr.

REPENTANCE

How kind is Allah the Exalted Whose mercy to His creatures knows no limits. The All-forgiving has opened to us the gates of repentance, granting us the chance to return to His Grace, but it is we who stand to blame for our failure to avail forgiveness, because of our blind obstinacy.

"Say: O my servants! who haie acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether; surely He is AU-forgiving, All-merciful."

Holy Qur'an (39: 53)

Allah the Exalted knows that the human beings, due to their earthly constitution, are likely to sin and err. They, therefore, are in need of an opportunity enabling them to repent and reform themselves, and hence the chance of repentance in the month of Ramadhan. Divine forgiveness is an opportunity for reform. Repentance is a process of transformation in the manner of life and nature of behaviourl and intellectual changes. It is also the outcome of a new resolution undertaken by the repentant for a fresh way of life to which he decides to adhere. The repentant of his sins as such is as if he had committed no sins at all.

Part of the divine favours to mankind is to keep the doors of forgiveness and mercy always open. Ramad/zan is the month of pardon and forgiveness, the season for praying and remembering the Almighty's favours. It is for us to avail this wonderful opportunity of repentance and ask forgiveness for all faults in sincerity, with an intention not to repeat them again. We should allow it to be a time of self-criticism and self-reproach, so that one may begin a new course, ushering in a true change in soul and thought, through one's deeds of faith during this period. This month-long opportunity to lead an Islamic way of life will enable one to observe Allah's commandments and adhere to the straight path of righteousness and bliss.

The month of Ramadhan creates an atmosphere of congregational worship, in which all Muslims feel they are living a new life and following a new direction. This stimulates a psychological state which helps them to repent, seek forgiveness and gain the blessings of the Almighty. In the process they witness a popular advancing towards Allah, while disdaining those who turn away from His straight path and His pleasure.

The opposite of these are those whose hearts are closed against the light of mercy, and their souls are irresponsive to the call of repentance. They do not even realize their own mistake when they see that collective procession moving towards Allah, the Exalted. They disregard all those reminders during the month of Ramadhan such as the obligation of fasting, the recommended reciting of the Qur'an, the gathering for invocation and preaching, and other rituals observing the sanctity of this montb. The Prophet described people who are unaffected by all this and have hearts full of cruelty, obstinacy and misery as:

"... indeed, miserable is the one who is deprived of Allah s forgiveness during this great month..." *

* Prophet's Sermon - Uyun Akhbar ar-Rid/ia.

THE SPRING OF THE QUR'AN

The month of Ramadhan is aptly termed the springtime of Qur'an. The Holy Book, the Almighty's final and most comprehensive revelation to mankind, was sent down to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) in this blessed month.

In this month the souls are more refined, more inclined towards the Creator, and more receptive towards the bounties in Allah's Book of wisdom, guidance and righteousness. Hence reciting the Qur'an and contemplating on its eternal verses is emphasized more in this blessed month than at any other time of the year.

The Prophet, says:

"...Invoke your Lord in right earnest with hearts that are free of sin and evil, to enable you to fast and to recite His Book (Qur'an) .." *

"... whoever recites an Aya (verse) from the Qur'an (in Ramadhwa) will receive a similar reward as the one who recites the whole Qur'an in other months." *

"He who makes lawful what is forbidden in the Qur an has no faith in it." *

The fifth Lmam of the Prophet's infallible progeny Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) says:

"Everything has a springtime and the springtime of the Qur'an is the month of Ramadhan."

Reports suggest Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) used to recite the whole Qur'an ten times during Ramadhan.

The eighth Lmam Au ibn Musa ar-Ridha (a.s.) advised one of his companions as follows:

"Invoke Allah, ask for forgiveness, recite the Qur'an and repent to Allah for your sins more frequently, so that the blessings of the month of Ramadhan may come to you, while you are sincere to Allah, the Exalted." *

The Prophet himself took the lead in this regard. He and his infallible progeny recited the Book of Allah more than anyone else in Ramadlzan. They taught Muslims how to con template on its eternal wisdom, apply its instructions in day-to-day affairs and enlighten people with its storehouse of knowledge.

What a wonderful trail they blazed, whose radiance enables us to tread the right path. We should seize upon this opportunity and endeavour to make the Holy Qur'an bloom its brightest in blessed Ramadhan. We should try to comprehend its eternal verses, and make others understand in turn. Although, reward is there for sincere efforts, reciting by rote without trying to understand the meaning of the glorious verses avails no benefit, and likewise mere understanding without practical application is also a futile exercise.

* Prophet's Sermon. Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridho.

* Prophet's Sermon - Uyun Akhbar or-Ridha.

* Al-Harani. Tuhaf al-Uqul.

* Wasa'il ash-Shia . al-Amili.

Hence, dear readers, let us promise this Ramadhan to educate and enlighten ourselves with the eterenal light of the Qur'an, our one and only constitution. The gems in the Holy Book's fathomless treasuries are waiting to be discovered, but have we pondered to explore them? The rich heritage bequeathed by the Prophet and his Ahl-ul-Bait is an ocean of knowledge dealing with every topic under the sun, but unfortunately we have turned our backs, lured by the deceptive glamour of the Western Culture.

The Qur'an opens to us new vistas of thought and heights never attained before. But look what the Western culture has done, degrading human honour, exploiting carnal desires and wasting away both our body and soul. Remember the Prophet's words:

“after death there will be no blaming, and after this world there is nothing except Paradise and Hell.” *

If today some apostate pours poison on human values in the enticing guise of literature, are we not to blame? True we have the Qur'an, and we sincerely defend it, even by sacrificing our lives. But, have we really done any concrete thing to enlighten others around of Islam's truth.

So dear readers, let us start, better late than never. The recent satanic slander against values we hold dear, should be enough to awaken our conscience, but the condition is sincerity of intention stemming from a pure and godfeannng heart as the next chapter stresses.

* Tarikh al- Yaqubi. vol. 2. p. 89. Dar Sadir. Beirut.

SUPPLICATION

Supplication is one of the greatest aspects of servitude and displays sincere submission to none other except Allah the Creator Who fashioned us from nothing, gives us our daily bread and affords us the chance to live this beautiful life, however short, but with promises of an eternal abode.

It is an expression of one's recognition of the Omniscient's Majesty and acknowledgement of the fact that He hears our invocations and responds to them. Are there not moments in our life when only divine grace has saved us or solved our anxieties? Allah's mercy is so all-embracing that He even responds to the call of the disbelievers in their hour of need if the invocation is sincerely directed.

“When My servants question you about Me, surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant, whet, he calls Me; so respond to Me, and believe in Me; so that they may be led aright.”

Holi' Qur'an (2: 186)

Supplication is also a psychological state arising from one's inner depths. It is the feeling of being in need of the Almighty. A feeling which educates one to have true faith in Allah, to love Him, to rid oneself of self-conceit and agogance, and to accept the principle of brotherhood and equality among all people. The elated feeling makes the suppliant realize that all are equal in their need of the Creator, and it is only He Who is above all needs and wants, and to Whom all creatures turn. Did not Allah give us the wonderful thing called intellect and made the human race the most excellent form of life on this Planet?

Invoking Allah the Exalted for help, seeking forgiveness for our errors and thanking the Almighty for His bounties is especially encouraged during blessed Ramodhan, so as to deepen our love and gratitude to Him. A sincere supplication serves as a wonderful tonic for our fasting body and soul. It purifies our souls, enlivens our hearts, awakens our conscience and reforms our out-~rd behaviour which all help to contribute towards a progressive and peaceful society.

The Prophet's sermon which we quoted at the beginning is a clear pointer in this regard:

"... Do repent to Allah for your sins, and supplicate with your hands raised at the times of prayer, as these are the best of times, during which the Almighty looks at His servants with mercy, (He) Answers if they supplicate, Responds if they call, Grants W they ask and Accepts jf they entreat..." *

Likewise, the miserable is the one who is deprived of divine grace in this month, as is evident from Imam Au's narration:

"Pray and seek forgiveness more frequently in the month of Ramadhtha'. Prayer wards off misfortune, and forgi veness cleanses you of your sins." *

Amir-ul-Momineen's gem of an advice has been sincerely followed by the righteous in every age and era. Is there any better example for Muslims than Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his noble progeny?

* Prophet's Sermon, Llvun Akhbar ar-Rid/ia.

* Wasa'il ash-Shia, al-Hur al-Amili.

ImamJa'far as-Sadiq(a.s.)advises Muslims to remember Allah and His bounties more in Ramadhan by reciting frequently Tahlil (La ilalia Ilallah - There is no god but Allah), Takbir (Allahu Akbar - Allah is Great), Tahmid (Al-Hamdu Lilah - Praise be to Allah) and Tasbih (Subhan Allah - Glory be to Allah).

Thus, as is clear, reciting the Qur'an, understanding its wisdom and supplicating to Allah does have a subliming effect on our souls and conscience. Divine grace not only inspires us towards good and creativity but also guards us against sin, error and all things perserve in this short life span.

For the benefit of dear readers, we have selected some supplications at the end of this booklet. Those looking for more details can refer to authentic books of prayer such as “Sahifa - SaJadia” which is a compilation of supplications from Zain-ül-Abideen (a.s.) the fourth Imam.

RECOMMENDED PRAYER

Recommended prayers -of course in addition to the 5 daily obligatory ones- have special merit in Ramadhan and are well rewarded by the Almighty.

“...Whoever offers recommended prayers in it (Ramadh,) Allah will save him from Hell, and whoever observes in it obligatories, his reward will be that of seventy such obligatories observed in other months. Whoever recites in it blessings (Salawat)on me, Allah will keep the scales of his good deeds heavy (on Judgement Day) whilst the scales of others will be tending to lightness...” *

At least, one should try to perform in this month Tahajjud, the late midnight prayer, which in light of traditions has many-fold benefits. It is called the Believer's Honour and could be performed until the call for the Fajr prayer. Our getting up for the last pre-dawn meal offers us the best opportunity to perform this recommended prayer whose benefits have been described as expiation for past sins, protection against torments of the grave, increase in daily provisions, forgiven~s for the parents, peace of mind and etc.

ImamJa'far as-Sadiq(a.s.)says that it was the habit of the Prophet during the last ten nights of Ramadhan to avoid the company of his wives and spend the nights in worship.

How bountiful is Divine grace, it affords us the chance to compensate for our neglect of prayers in the past, and to ask mercy for our parents or deceased relatives and friends.

Interested readers are advised to consult local scholars or refer to authentic books which deal with recommended prayers in Ramadhan.

CHARITRY

Another great blessing of Ramadhan is charity and the giving of alms for the poor and the deprived.

Besides educationg the self, charity promotes love and harmony in the society we live in.

Though charity and alms-giving are always stressed in Islam, they assume added significance in the blessed month of fasting, as is evident by narratives reaching us from the Prophet and his progeny.

What a wonderful social institution Islam has created by emphasizing on these wonderful aspects. It instills in the society a feeling of brotherhood and makes us realize the fact that before our Lord the Creator we are all equal. We are in need of His mercy as the less fortunate in this mundane world of matter deserve kindness and generosity. After all, we have been given wealth and power as a trial, to see how we spend it and how we care for our fellow humans.

Ramadhan is the month of freedom from sins and bondage, from desire and exploitation. As we wish to attain forgiveness for our past mistakes so should we mete out pardon and justice to those in our temporary worldly power.

It was the habit of the Prophet to set free prisoners of war during Ramadhan.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) narrates that his illustrious grandfather Imam Zain-ul-Abideen (a.s.) used to emancipate twenty or more slaves on the last day of Ramadhan.

Thus charity does not go unanswered. In fact it is a sin to hoard and make things rust and rot instead of giving to the needy and the deprived.

* Was'îl ash-Shia. al-Hur al-Amili.

IMMORTAL OCCASIONS

THE GRAND NIGHT

Blessed Ramadhan, as we have explained, is the month of action, reform, creativity and generosity, and besides it contains a very special occasion, the immortal night called Laylat-uI-Qadr. Roughly translated as the Night of Grandeur, it is the night on which the Holy Qur'an was sent down:

"..the Grand Night is better than a thousand months. The Angels and the Spirit descend therein by the permission of their Lord for (decreeing) every affair. Peace! it is till the breaking of the dawn.

Holy Qur'an (97: 3 - 5)

The Holy Book further says:

"Surely We revealed it on a blessed night -Indeed We are ever warning. Therein every wise affair is made distinct. A command from Us; surely We are the senders."

Holy Qur'an (44 3 - 5)

When asked about Allah's saying "We revealed it on a blessed night...", Imam Muhammad aI-Baqir (a.s.) replied:

"Yes, it is Laylat-ul- Qadr, it comes every year, in the month of Ramadhwr, during its last ten nights. The Qur'an was not sent down but on the Grand Night as Allah says:In it every wise affair is made clear. That is, He decrees that night everything to happen during the year..Questioned further on what is meant by "Laylat-ul- Qadr is better than a thousand months?~ He said, Good deeds - such as prayer charity, and etc. done that night are better than similar deeds during a thousand months without the Grand Night ..."

Hence, every believer has been enjoined to keep awake the whole Night of Qadr in prayer and seeking from the Almighty, pardon for sins and bounties he/she desires for.

A commentator says that the term thousand must be talçen in an indefinite sense, i.e. a timeless time, and interprets it to mean that one moment of enlightenment under

Allah's light is better than thousands of months or the year of animal life, and such a moment converts the night of darkness into a period of spiritual glory.

Concerning forgiveness and granting of divine bounties on this night there is a justification attached. After fasting for forty days the Lord granted Prophet Moses (a.s.) the Law (Exodus 24:18) and after a similar fasting period Prophet Jesus (a.s.) was commissioned with his office (Mathew 4:2). Thus, there is justification in the Almighty's special grant of forgiveness and bestowing of favours to obedient Muslims, who fast as per His cGmmand for the whole month consecutively.

Like the Qur'an, other Heavenly Books were also sent down in this blessed month to the respective Prophets. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) says:

"The Torah was sent down on the 6th of Ramadhan, the Evangel on the 12th, the Book of Psalms on the 18th, and the Fur qan (the Qur'an) on the Grand Nigh t."*

There are various narrations regarding the particular Night. The Qur'an did not mention any specific night, so as to encourage prayer and worship throughout the month.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) questioned about the Night of Qadr said:

"Seek it in 19th, 21st and 23rd nigh ts.

Hence, Muslims are advised to spend the above nights, especially the 23rd in prayer and good deeds. Some of the recommended acts on the Grand Night are as follows:

- 1) Ghusl - taking bath.
- 2) Keeping awake the whole night praying and supplicating to Allah.
- 3) Charity and helping the poor and the needy.
- 4) Reciting the Holy Qur'an, especially the suras Rum, AnkaE~out and Dukhan.

In short, the Night of Qadr is the Grandest Night of the year. In the light of hadith, it is said that this night, Allah, the Exalted decrees providence and every other affair of mankind to happen throughout the year. So, we must pray in sincerity and try to extract the maximum benefit from this Night of Grace and Grandeur. Ameen.

* Wasa'il ash-Shia. aI-Hur aI-Amili.

OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS OF RAMADHAN

The month of fasting is not without its days of joy and sorrow. It has some important historical events which even today continue to wield their influence on the daily life of Muslims.

The year preceding his migration to Medina, the Prophet suffered two serious blows during Ramadhan, losing within a few days those two stalwarts of early Islam, his loving wife Khadija and doting uncle Abu Talib. The year is known in the annals of history as the Year of Grief

Umm-ul-Momineen Khadija needs no introduction to Muslims. She married Muhammad (s.a.w.) years before the start of his divine mission and at once believed in him when he was appointed to the Prophethood by the Almighty. Thereafter, she sacrificed her fabulous wealth for the propagation of Islam, and stood by her noble husband in all difficulties. They made an excellent husband and wife pair for 27 odd years, and as long as she was alive, he never took another wife.

By Khadija the Prophet had several children including son Qasim through whom his Kunya (agnomen) Abul Qasim is derived. But none of the children survived except daughter Fatima, through whose two sons Imam Hassan and Imam Hussain (a.s.) Prophet Muhammad's noble lineage (Seyyids) has spread out around the world.

The Prophet was nearly 53 years of age when he lost Khadija and though he married several women later in life, these were mere matrimonial alliances in view of the social or political necessities. The following narration found in all authentic sources proves that he always used to cherish the memory of that loyal woman who was the mother of his illustrious Ahi-ul-Bait.

Once when one of his wives, Ayesha, questioned about Khadija, the Prophet replied:

"Allah did not give me a better one than her. She was the mother of my children and the light of the house. She believed in me when others denied me. She supported me with her wealth when people deprived me. I had my children through her, but I was deprived of having them from others(wives)." *

The second blow he suffered in that Year of Grief was the sad demise of his uncle and guardian Abu Talib. After losing his grandfather Abdul-Muttalib at the tender age of eight, the Prophet was raised up by his dear uncle Abu Talib and his wife Fatima bint Asad as their own child. A close bond existed between uncle and nephew, and as long as Abu Talib's towering presence loomed large in Mecca, the infidels could never think of doing bodily harm to the Pro- bet.

* Refer Musnad ,4hmal bin Hanbal Part 6. p. II 7. Sahih Bukhari. Part 2. p. 177 and also Part 4.p. 36. 195. !bn MajaBab al-Ghira, Abwab an-Nikah. Parr 1. p. 315. Ibn Kathir m Tarikh Kamel vol. 3, p. 128. and various other sources. It means the cuntinuat ion of pro gem, because later in life he had son called Ibrahim through his Egrptian wife Man the Copt who died in infancy.

The passing away of Abu Talib was a deep shock, and emboldened Meccan Jahiliyya, who seeing a great obstacle removed from their way; ganged up for an attempt against the Prophet's life. The events of the Hijra are outside the scope of our book, and it suffices here to quote the nephew's saying on the uncle's demise:

"The Quraysh could not raise a hand against me until Abu Talib died."

But the greatest tragedy in fasting Ramadhan is the martyrdom of Imam Au ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), the Prophet's loyal cousin, husband of his dear daughter Fatima, and his valiant standard bearer who single-handedly won many a crucial battle. Imam Ali's (a.s.) peerless personality ranks second only to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), and books galore on his wise sayings, heroic deeds, praises and other excellent qualities.

On the 19th of Ramadhan, in the year 40 A.H., while leading the morning prayer at Masjid Kufa (Iraq), Amir-alMomineen Ali (a.s.) was struck on the head by the assassin's sword in the very act of prostration. The blow by AbdurRahman ibn Mulj i m the Khariji te (heretic) cut a deep wound and for three days the Commander of the Faithful passed in pain.

Finally on the 21st of Ramadhan the Imam attained martyrdom, an event which plunged the Ummah into chaos and enabled the Omayyud tyrants to seize power and distort Islam.

Let us now review the days of joy in this blessed month. On 15th Ramadhan, in the second year of the Hijra, the Prophet became a grandfather, when son Hassan (a.s.) was born to his daughter Fatima and Imam Ali (a.s.). It was a very happy occasion for the AhI-ul-Bait and none was more happy than Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.).

The Qur'an and hadith bear witness to his pristine purity, enjoining Muslims to love and tread the radiant path of the Prophet's illustrious progeny. Being forced to abdicate the Khaliphate a few months after his father Imam Au's martyrdom, Imam Hassan (a.s.) spent the rest of his life in Medina propagating and expounding Islam and the Holy Qur'an.

The same year on 2nd Ramadhan, the history of faith and righteousness took a new turn, when a few hundred Muslims defeated a vastly superior force of Meccan pagans, at a place called Badr. It was the first armed encounter the new found Islamic State had to face, and by the Grace of the Almighty, it came out with flying colours.

Six years later, in the year 8 A.H. Allah bestowed another great victory for the Prophet in blessed Ramadhan, when Mecca the hitherto bastion of infidelity fell without a fight. Abu Sufyan and his pagan hordes laid down their arms, and Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) entered his birthplace granting amnesty to his deadly adversaries on condition they accept Islam. He then purged that pinnacle of monotheism, the Holy Ka'ba , Of the filth of idols, with Imam All personally dismantling the deities atop the holy house. Bilal, the Abyssinian then called the faithful to prayer.

"There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah."

Hence, dear Muslims we must strive to keep fresh the memory of these great events which shaped our history and laid firm the foundations of the Almighty's last revelation to mankind, Islam. By organising speeches and lectures, as is normally seen in Ramadhan, we not only enlighten our young

ones of the significance of this blessed month and its immortal events, but also acquaint others of Islam's lofty teachings. Likewise it is incumbent upon us to stop those violating the sanctity of this month in public places by eating, drinking or mocking at religious tenets.

RULES OF FASTING

WAYS TO IDENTIFY THE FIRST AND LAST DAYS OF RAMADHAN

Since Ramadhan is a lunar month, it is necessary to ascertain the new moon in order to facilitate fasting. The Sharia has accordingly prescribed one of the following ways to identify the first and last days of Ramadhan:

- 1- One sees the new moon himself.
- 2- A group of trustworthy people report seeing the new moon.
- 3- Two just men report seeing the new moon, and their descriptions do not disagree.
- 4- Thirty days have passed since the beginning of Sha ban.
- 5- The leading mujtahid* states that it is the first of Ramadhan.

The same procedure also applies to the last day of Ramadhan and Eid-u-Fitr.

Note: an astronomical report on the new moon is not a binding verification of the first day of Ramadhan.

DAY OF DOUBT

1- If one is not certain whether it is the last day of Sha'ban (the preceding month) or the first day of Ramadhan, that person is not obliged to fast that day. However, if one chooses to do an optional or defaulted fast that day, and later on discovers it was the first of Ramadhan, it will be regarded as a normal Ramadhan fast.

2- If one intends to break fast on the day of doubt, but has had none of the fast-breakers, then before noon the day was proved to be of Ramadhan, one must intend to fast that day as a fast of Ramadhan. In this way the day's fasting will be deemed correct.

3- But if one has had a fast-breaker, and before noon the day was proved to be of Ramadhan, it is obligatory to attain the rest of the day, and make default for it later. Similarly if it was known in the afternoon, that the day was proved to be of Ramadhan, one must abstain the rest of the day, and make default later, even if one has had none of the fast-breakers. necessary for fasting. Those who are sick are exempted, and nor should one fast when sure of adverse effects on health, or fears possibility of adverse effects.

* A mujtahid is a person who is an expert in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh): he is also called faqih.

CLARIFICATION:

a. If one fears -the fear of any prudent person- that fasting will make him/her sick, worsen malady or bring harm then he/she should not fast, but make up for the defaulted fasts later, on regaining health.

b. Mere feeling of weakness~.or for that matter psychological fear is not an excuse to forego fasting or to break fast. But if the physical weakness is very severe and unbearable and is taxing the power of resistance, then it is allowed to break the- fast.

c. If fasting has no adverse effects for a sick person, then it is obligatory for him/her to fast.

d. If one fasts, believing there will be no adverse effects, but it turns out later that fasting did harm his/her condition, such a fast is not regarded as correct.

e. If one fasts knowing that it will be harmful, or possibly harmful, his/her fasting is null.

INTENTION

Earlier we had briefly mentioned the significance of intention necessary for fasting. Those who are sick are exempted, and nor should one fast when sure of adverse effects on health, or fears possibility of adverse effects.

CLARIFICATION:

a. If one fears -the fear of any prudent person- that fasting will make him/her sick, worsen malady or bring harm then he/she should not fast, but make up for the defaulted fasts later, on regaining health.

b. Mere feeling of weakness,or for that matter psychological fear is not an excuse to forego fasting or to break fast. But if the physical weakness is very severe and unbearable and is taxing the power of resistance, then it is allowed to break the- fast.

c. If fasting has no adverse effects for a sick person, then it is obligatory for him/her to fast.

d. If one fasts, believing there will be no adverse effects, but it turns out later that fasting did harm his/her condition, such a fast is not regarded as correct.

e. If one fasts knowing that it will be harmful, or possibly harmful, his/her fasting is null.

INTENTION

Earlier we had briefly mentioned the significance of intention (Niyya). Here, we wish to deal in detail with this important subject.

A tradition from Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) says:

“Deeds depend on intentions.”

Hence, Intention is compulsory for every devotional act. A devotional act, without a true, purely God-oriented intention, is void. Fasting is thus one such act which requires the intention of gaining proximity to Allah. Yet, such an intention need not necessarily be present in the mind of the fasting person at each and every single moment of fasting, but the person concerned should be aware of the state. The intention to fast will remain effective, and even if one forgets or sleeps, the fast will be valid.

However, the intention to fast requires certain basic rules:

1. Intention depends on two options. One can intend on the first eve of Ramadhan to fast for the whole month, or can make the intention daily for that particular day, but before dawn breaks.

2. The intention should be to fast from fair (a little before dawn breaks) till Maghrib (a little after sunset).

Thus, fasting will cover the entire period of the day, beginning at dawn till the redness of the dusk disappears in the east. During this time one should abstain from eating, drinking and all other acts which break fasting.

3. The end of the day comes a little after sunset. Sunset is not determined by the mere disappearance of the sun's orb, but the disappearance of the redness of the dusk in the east.

ACTIONS WHICH MAKE THE FAST INVALID

1. Eating or drinking anything in any quantity.

2. Sexual intercourse.

3. Any sexual activity that leads to ejaculation.

4. Attributing a lie to Allah, the Holy Prophet or the Imams (peace be upon them).

5. Allowing heavy dust or thick smoke (including tobacco) reach one's throat.

6. Submerging one's entire head in water.

7. Remaining in need of obligatory bathing for janabah,* haydh (menstruation) or nifas* up to the time of the morning adhan.

8. Taking a liquid enema.

9. Intentional vomiting.

* The state resulting from sexual intercourse with or without ejaculation. or seminal discharge while awake or asleep.

* Bleeding that occurs after childbirth or abortion.

CLARIFICATIONS:

- 1) If a person commits intentionally and willingly an act which breaks the fast, that day's fast will be considered invalid, but the fast is valid if the action committed was unintentional or involuntary.
- 2) If one breaks fast after merely being threatened, that fast is considered invalid and must be compensated later.
- 3) A fasting person can swallow the saliva gathered in the mouth, but nasal discharge and frothy sputum must be spitted out.
- 4) To rinse mouth during ablutions is allowed and while doing if the water slips unintentionally down into the throat it will not break the fast.
- 5) Taking of injection in the muscles or veins is permitted as also using of medicinal drops in ears or eyes is allowed.
- 6) Brushing of teeth is permitted, provided the froth or saliva does not enter the throat.

EXEMPTIONS FROM FASTING

Islam is called a natural religion. In other words, its laws unlike other creeds have logic and reason behind them and divine providence has fashioned them according to the nature of man and woman. It has no hard and fast rules for all age groups ignoring the state, or circumstances of the individual concerned. In such a case, its very claim to be natural and universal would have been open to doubt.

How merciful and benign is the Creator, Who as a sign of His unbounded bounty exempted from fasting, persons passing through particular circumstances, and in a certain state of health or age group.

Following are those whom Islam has quite logically exempted from fasting and furthermore has released them from expiation for defaults:

1. Minors- for pre-puberty years.
2. Insane- for the period insanity lasts.
3. Unconscious- for the period of unconsciousness.
4. Non-Muslims -for the years before conversion to Islam.

DEFAULTED FASTS

There are different status of defaulted fasts:

1. An aged person who cannot fast is exempted from fasting and also from expiation. If, after Ramadhan, it becomes possible for that aged person to fast, he/she should make up the defaulted Ramadhan fasts.
2. An aged person for whom fasting is hard is exempted but must pay 3/4 kilogram (1 Mud) of food to the poor for every day of defaulted fast.
3. One who has a condition which causes insatiable thirst and who cannot tolerate going without water, or for whom fasting is hard is exempted.
 - a- In the latter case, one must pay 3/4kilogram of food to the poor for every day of defaulted fast.
 - b- If after Ramadhan , it becomes possible for both cases to fast, one should make up defaulted fasts.
4. A woman who is pregnant and whose delivery time is near, or a woman who is breast-feeding her child, if fasting will harm herself or her baby, she should not fast.

a- She must give 3/4 kilogram of food as expiation to the poor and, make up for the defaulted fasts.

b- In case the harm was for herself only and not for the child, then she should make up for the defaulted fasts without giving expiation.

5. Apostate (murtad) -A Muslim who turns away from Islam, should compensate for fasts defaulted during the period of apostacy.

6. Women in their monthly period or during childbirth should compensate for defaulted fasts.

7. A traveller who missed certain days fast because of journey has to make up for missed fasts.

8. A sick person after recovery must fast the number of days missed during Ramadhan.

a- A sick person provided the sickness continues for one full year until next Ramadhan is exempted. However, in such case one must pay 3/4 kilogram of wheat or any other staple food to the needy as expiation for the days missed.

b- If one has not kept the fast for reasons other than sickness (example: being on a journey), and the same reason continues until next Ramadhan, that person must make up for the defaulted fasts, and it is also advisable to give 3/4 kilogram of food to the poor for every day of defaulted fast.

CLARIFICATIONS:

Defaulted fasts should be made up before the next Ramadhan. In case defaulted fasts are delayed after next Ramadhan, then one has time to fast afterwards whenever one can but that person should in addition distribute 3/4 kilogram of wheat or any staple food to the needy for each day of defaulted fasts as expiation.

ATONEMENT

If a person for whom Ramadhan fasting is compulsory, breaks the fast intentionally and willingly, must do an act of atonement in addition to making up the defaulted fast.

Sharia prescribes three methods of atonement, and any one method will atone for one day of defaulted fasting:

1- Freeing a slave.

2- Fasting for 60 days. The first 31 days of this fast must be consecutive. If, in the first 31 days, a reason arises for breaking fast, such as the menstrual period, or a journey which can on no account be delayed, one need not start the 31 days of fasting over and again. Rather, that person can complete the remaining days when the cause is removed.

3- Feeding 60 poor Muslims (for one full meal). If one cannot afford to feed 60 poor Muslims, should then feed as many as possible. In case of not being able to feed anyone, then that person should sincerely plead Allah for forgiveness (say astaghflrullah) for the deed done. It is a

necessary precaution to perform any of the three methods of atonement whenever one is able to do.

If one invalidates the fast with a forbidden act (haram) such as drinking wine, adultery etc., must observe all the three above-mentioned atonements

and if unable to afford all, must observe the least taxing, and if that is also not possible must sincerely seek forgiveness from Allah.

TRAVELLER'S FAST

1- A traveller who has to shorten prayers* for a journey must not fast. But this does not apply to a person whose duty is to travel and who observes normal prayers, such as a professional traveller (e.g. sailor, pilot driver, roving salesman, etc.), who must fast.

2- A fasting person who begins a journey in the afternoon, must continue the fast. If the journey was before noon, and on reaching a point where neither one's hometown houses are visible nor the sound of adhan is heard, the traveller must break the fast. But if the fast was broken before reaching that particular point, an atonement should be paid.

3- If a traveller returns to hometown. Or reaches a place before noon, intending to stay ten days, and has not done anything which would invalidate the fast, must fast that day. In case the traveller did something that would invalidate the fast, that day's fast is not obligatory. However, if a traveller arrives home or to a place afternoon, where a ten day stay is intended, that particular day's fast is not obligatory.

RECOMMENDED FASTS

Besides the obligatory fasting of Ramadhan, there are recommended fasts in ordinary days of the year, for those seeking to avail of Allah's unbounded bounty. Some of these are as follows:

- 1) Three days of every lunar month, especially the first, the middle and the last.
- 2) Every Thursday and Friday.
- 3) Fast during the months of Rajab and Sha'ban.

* To and fro distance of about 45 kilometers shortens four Rakaat prayer to two, and breaks the fast.

FORBIDDEN FASTS

But, fasting on the following days is forbidden in Islam:

- 1) Fasting on Eid-ul-Fitr.
- 2) Fasting on the Eid of Sacrifice (Al-Adhha).
- 3) Fasting on the 30th of Sha'ban with intention of Ramadhan.
- 4) Fasting during the Hajj (pilgrimage) in Mina (11, 12, 13th of Dhulhtjjah).
- 5) Fast of silence no problem.

Note: the woman should not perform recommended fasting without her husband's permission, and if he objects to her fasting, it is forbidden for her to do so.

ZAKAT-UL-FITR

1) Zakat-ul-Fitr, paid on Eid, following the end of Ramadhan is obligatory for any person who is mature, sane, conscious and financially able, at sunset on the last day of Ramadhan to pay for himself and his dependents. The rate is three kilograms of wheat, barley, raisin, rice or similar produce per person. It is also permitted to give the cash value of such items.

2) The proper amount of the said Zakat must be paid or set aside before one offers the Eid prayer on Zakat-ul-Fitr.

3) If one does not offer the Eid prayer, the Zakat-ul-Fitr must be paid before noon of that day.

4) Zakat-ul-Fitr should be used in one of the following ways:

1- Given to a poor person whose income or cash in hand is not enough to meet his own and his family's expenses for an entire year.

2- Given to a needy person who is completely helpless and indigent.

3- Given to those whose job is the collection of Zakat and its distribution and should be paid to those who deserve receiving it.

4- Given to those whose hearts can be influenced to incline to Muslims or Islam, such as non-Muslims who would be attracted to Islam or would help Muslims in a time of war if they are given proceeds from Zakat.

5- To free slaves.

6- To repay the debt of a person who cannot do so himself.

7- To be used in the way of Allah for works of public benefit such as building mosques, schools or bridges.

8- To aid a traveller who is in need of help during journey and needs to return home.

The time for taking out Zakat-ul-Fitr is the eve of Eid, and pay the same from the night of Eid till noon on the Eid day.

SELECTED SUPPLICATIONS

It is recommended to recite the following two supplications after every prayer during Ramadhan:

"O High, O Great, O Forgiver, O Merciful, You are the Great Lord, Whom nothing can resemble, and is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. And this is the month which You have honoured, exalted, glorified and excelled over other months. And it is the month in which You prescribed fasting for me. And it is the month of Ramadhan, in which You sent down the Qur'an, as a guidance to people, and clear signs of guidance and Furqan (distinction between right and wrong). And You have made in it the Night of Qadr, and made it better than a thousand months. O One Who favours all and is favoured by none, favour me by saving me from Hell as You have favoured others. Admit me into Paradise through Your Mercy. O Most-Merciful of the Merciful."

"O Allah, let happiness enter(the hearts of)those who dwell in the graves:
O Allah, grant affluence to all the poor;
O Allah, satisfy the hunger of all the hungry ones;
O Allah, clothe all the naked ones;
O Allah, help all debtors to pay their debts;
O Allah, relieve the sufferings of all those in distress;
O Allah, help all travellers to (safely) return home ;
O Allah, release all the prisoners;
O Allah, straighten out all the defects (that have developed) in the affairs of Muslims;
O Allah, restore to health all those who are sick;
O Allah, ease our poverty by Your (unlimited) wealth;
O Allah, change our difficult state by the excellence of Your state.
O Allah, help us to pay our debts and free us from poverty. Surely, You are able over everything."

It is also recommended to recite the following supplications which for the benefit of our readers have been classified according to each day of Ramadhan.

1st day :

"O Allah, accept my fast in it (Ramadhan) as the fast of those whose fact (is acceptable to You). Forgive my sins in it, O the Lord of the Universe. Pardon me, O the Pardoner of sinners."

2nd day :

"O Allah, in it bring me near Your good pleasure and keep me away from Your anger and displeasure. Guide me to recite Your revelation (the Qur'an) through Your Mercy, O, the Most Merciful One."

3rd day :

"O Allah, in it grant me wisdom and awareness. Keq me away from ignorance and pretension. A ward me a share from all the blessings that You bestowed in it (Ramadhan); O the Most benevolent of all benevolents."

4th day :

“O Allah, give me strength to observe Your orders. Encourage me through Your kindness to thank You. Keep me wader Your protection: O One Who sees everything.”

5th day:

"O Allah, place me in it among the ranks of the repenters, and make me among Your good servants. Make me one of Your pious devotees through Your Mercy; O Most Generous of the Generous.”

6th day:

“O Allah, do not leave me alone to be overcome by sins. Grant me refuge from Your wrath and anger. I appeal to Your kindness and bounty; O the last refuge for those who crave for help.”

7th day:

"O Allah, help me to keep fasts and to offer prayers in this (month). Protect me in it from errors and sins. Bestow on me Your remembrance and thanks through Your continuous guidance. O Guide of the Believers”.

8th day:

"O Allah, make me kind towards orphans and to feed the hungry and saj' greetings. And grant me the company of the righteous and to shun the evil-doers through Your benevolence.O Hope of the hopeful.”

9th day:

"O Allah, bestow on me a share out of Your ample Mercy. Guide me to understand Your clear proofs and lead me towards Your good pleasure through Your love. O Hope of the seekers.”

10th day:

“O Allah, make me among those who trust You, successful an Your estimation, near to You. O Besought of the beseachers.”

11th day:

"O Allah, incline me towards good deeds and make me to dislike transgression and disobedience. Protect me from Your wrath and the fire through Your power. O the Support of those who seek help.”

12th day:

"O Allah, grant me refuge and chastity in it, and make me contented, and save me from what Ifear through Your protection. O Shelter of the scared.”

13th day:

"O Allah, cleanse me of all impurities and foul practices, give me the strength to bear all the events ordained by You. Guide me towards piety and

the company of the good-doers through Your sustenance. O the Comforter of the eyes of the destitutes.”

14th day:

”O Allah, do not take me to task for my errors. Pardon my sins and unspeakable deeds. Let me not be the target of evil and vicissitudes through Your honour. O One Who honors Muslims.”

15th day:

”O Allah, bestow on me the sincerity of the worshipers. Expend my breast for sincere repentance. O Shelter of the scared.”

16th day:

”O Allah, guide me towards the deed of the righteous people and keep me away from the company of the wicked. Admit me by Your mercy to the permanent abode, through Your Divinity. O the Lord of the universe.”

17th day:

”O Allah, guide me towards good deeds. Grant my needs and wants. O One Who needs no reminder. O One Who is aware of what passes in the hearts of the beings.”

18th day:

”O Allah, awake me up to get the blessings of its Suhour (before the formal start of a fast) and fill my heart with Its lights. Make all my organs to follow its obligatories. O One Who enlightens the hearts of the knowing people.”

19th day:

”O Allah, Let me have an ample share of (this month's) blessings, and make easy for me the path of righteousness and deprive me not of its bounties. O One Who guides to the right path.”

20th day:

”O Allah, open for me in (this month) the gates of paradise and close the gates of hell. Give me strength to recite the Qur'an. O One Who brings satisfaction to the hearts of the believers.”

21st day:

”O Allah, lead me in (this month) to win Your good pleasure and not let the devil have access to me in it. O One Who fulfills the needs of the needy.”

22nd day:

”O Allah, open for me in (this month) the Gates of Your bounty and bestow on me Your blessings. Encourage me to gain Your pleasure and admit me to enter Your paradise. O One Who answers the supplication of the oppressed.”

23rd day:

"O Allah, cleanse me in (this month) of all sins and purify me from all defects. Test my heart and see if I abstain from what is forbidden. O One Who overlooks the shortcomings of the sinners."

24th day:

"O Allah, in (this month) I beg for that which pleases You and for protection against that which displeases You. Teach me to obey Your commands and refrain from disobedience. O One Who is aware of what passes in the hearts of the beings."

25th day:

"O Allah, make me love those close to You and an enemy of those who are Your enemies. Make me follow in the footsteps of the last Prophet (s.a. w.). O the Exalted in the hearts of all the prophets."

26th day:

"O Allah, let my good efforts in this month be fruitful and my sins pardoned and my actions accepted and my defects concealed. O the Most Hearing."

27th day:

"O Allah, let me make a greater effort of Nawafil (recommended prayers) in this month. Grant me through Your kindness to do good deeds which save me on the Judgement Day. Guide me to the best means which lead me towards You. O One Who doesn't get bored from the insistence of the supplicants."

28th day:

"O Allah, in (this month) shower Your mercy upon me. Bestow on me Your Blessings and keep me away from sins. Cleanse my heart of all impurities. O One Who is Merciful on His believing servants."

29th day:

"O Allah, bestow on me the blessings of the Night of Qadr. Let my difficulties and problems be overcome. Accept my repentance, free me from my sins and evil acts. O One Who is Merciful towards the virtuous."

30th day:

"O Allah, perfect my faults to the stage which is acceptable to You and to Your beloved Messenger, in a way that the results of my fasts may lead me to a life of purity and righteousness, for the sake of Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his progeny."

EID PRAYER

The Eid Prayer is obligatory under certain conditions, and its time is sunrise till noon. It is prayed in congregation.

Women are exempted from this prayer, but if they are inclined there is no restriction for them to pray.

The Eid prayer has two rakaats. In the first rakaat, there are five takbirs* and five qunuts* and in the second rakaat, there are four takbirs and four qunuts . Eid prayer is performed as follows:

In the first rakaat, after reciting al-Hamd and another sura, (preferably sura A'ala), recite takbir and raise your hands to recite qunut.

After finishing, recite takbir and qunut again. Repeat

After the fifth qunut, recite takbir and then perform ruku (bowing) and two sajdahs (prostration) and stand erect. This completes one rakaat.

In the second rakaat, after reciting al-Hamd and one other sura, (preferably sura Shams), recite takbir and qunut four times in the same manner as in the first rakaat and complete the prayer as usual.

After prayer, the Imam (prayer leader) recites two Khutbas (sermons).

Note: The Eid prayer unlike the 5 daily prayers is not preceded by Adhan or Iqamah, but it is recommended to call thrice As-Salaat (To Prayer).

DU'A-QUNUT

"O Allah, Lord of magnificence and greatness; and Lord of generosity and overwhelming power; and Lord of pardon and mercy. We implore You for the sake of this day which You have appointed as a Festival for the Muslims and for Muhammad (s.a. w.) and his progeny as a reminder, a distinction, an honour, to bless Muhammad and his progeny and admit me to all the bounties to which You have admitted Muhammad and his progeny, and keep me away from all evils from which You have kept away Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his progeny. May Your blessings be upon him and his progeny. I beg of You of the best which has been asked for by Your virtuous good servants, and I seek Your protection from all those evils from which Your sincere servants have sought Your protection."

It is preferable to go to the Mosque for Eid Prayer. If this is not possible then one should say the prayer at home, in the manner described above. If this is not possible, then recite it like the morning prayers, but in the first Rakaat recite Qunut (whatever you know) 5 times, and in the second Rakaat 4 times.

Ghusul (bath) on Eid day is optional which should be taken under a shelter and not under the open sky.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

* Takbir is to say Allahu akbar (Allah is Great).

* Qunut is the recommended supplication recited during the daily prayers. It is obligatory for a total of five takbirs and qunuts.