



Assalaam 'alaykum warahmatullaahi wabarakaatuh

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THE ORDER TO FAST

"O You who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may acquire Taqwa.

"Fast for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days. And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g. an old man), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a poor person (for every day). But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast is better for you, if only you know."

[Baqarah 2:183-184]

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF RAMADAAN

During Ramadaan, do not let the sweetness of your deeds vanish into the night, leaving only emptiness. When one contemplates the texts on fasting, its wisdom and goals and looks at the reality of the Muslim communities, one realises there is a wide gap between the reality and our obligations. Remember! Ramadaan is a bounty that Allaah blessed His servants with, to strengthen their faith and increase their Taqwa. Allaah said:

"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become pious." [2:183]

This article attempts to present the basic causes of this gap, and to offer some remedies. Many Muslims are ignorant about the goals of fasting and the wisdom behind it thus they fast merely to conform to the social environment without contemplation. If one is not aware of the divine wisdom of Shari'ah and its fruits in this world and in the Hereafter, how can one apply it correctly.

GOALS OF FASTING

Achieving Taqwa: is one of the greatest wisdoms of fasting. At the same time, it

lessens the desire of the stomach and mutes the sexual appetite. Whoever fasts frequently can overcome these desires and other sins more easily.

Strengthening willpower & acquiring patience:

The Prophet called Ramadaan the month of patience as it increases one's willpower to control desires and the selfishness of his soul. This allows him to be stronger in following Allaah's commands and being patient in obeying Allaah by stopping at His limits, both by way of action and abstention. Allaah said: **"These are the limits set by Allaah, so approach them not."** [2:18 7]

Fasting is pure worship:

The fact that he is abstaining from food and drink, both in public and in secret, shows his honest faith and strong love of Allaah, and his knowledge and feeling that Allaah is All-Knowing. For this reason Allaah has made the reward for fasting unique and different to that for any other type of worship. Allaah says:

"Every deed of the son of Aadam will be multiplied [in rewards], the

"Fasting and [reading] Qur'aan will intercede for the person-

*fasting will say:
'O Lord I forbade him eating and drinking so let me intercede for him,'*

The Qur'aan will say:

'I deprived him from his night sleep so let me intercede for him,'"

He (saw) then said: "So they will intercede." [Ahmad]

good deed by 10 of its like, up to 700 [times its like], up to whatever Allaah wills, except fasting, it is for Me and I will reward it. He abandons his desire and his food for My Sake..” [Muslim]

Ibn al-Qayyim (rh) commented: “...And people may see that a person is not eating in front of them, but the fact that he is really abandoning his food and his desire for the sake of Allaah is a thing that no one can find out about, and that is the essence of fasting.”

Relieving Muslims from life’s distractions:

Eating, drinking and socialising all distract a person and weaken ties with Allaah. It is by the Mercy of Allaah that Muslims are ordered to fast so as not to be bothered by the intrusion of these activities, nor by the thought of them, when devoting themselves to worship. For this reason the Prophet said: “*Fasting is a shield, and a secure fortress against the Hellfire.*” [Ahmad]

Discovering Allaah’s blessings:

One experiences the hardship of the poor. He should thank Allaah, Who blessed him with His bounty while others are deprived. This should make him more sympathetic and willing to share this bounty. The poor rediscover that fasting helps a person be more devoted to worship. More able to concentrate and meditate. He should then be able to offer this devotion all year long, a blessing he should thank Allaah for.

Acquiring strength and endurance:

Depriving the body of food for a period of time helps its defence and endurance mechanism, thus protecting it from certain diseases.

Fasting is not only dependent on abstentions:

Many believe that fasting consists only of restrictions, forgetting that Allaah established certain acts of worship with fasting. Among which are:

Night prayer: “Whoever performed

the night prayer during Ramadaan out of eemaan and anticipating Allaah’s rewards, will be forgiven his previous sins.” [Muslim]

Performing Umrah: The Prophet (saw) said,

“*An Umrah during Ramadaan is like a Hajj with me.*” [al-Hakeem]

Offering Iftaar to those who fasted. “*Whoever feeds a fasting person has the same reward as him, except that the reward of the fasting person will not decrease.*” [Ahmad]

Reading and completing the Qur’aan: “*Fasting and [reading] Qur’aan will intercede for the person: fasting will say: ‘O Lord I forbade him eating and drinking so let me intercede for him,’ and the Qur’aan will say: ‘I deprived him from his night sleep so let me intercede for him.’”* He (saw) then said: “*So they will intercede.*” [Ahmad]

Giving in charity: “The Prophet was the most generous among people, and he was more generous during the month of Ramadaan.” [Muslim]

I’tikaaf: Confining oneself in the masjid for prayer and invocation, leaving the worldly activities. “The Prophet (saw) used to perform I’tikaaf during the last ten days of Ramadaan.” [Muslim]

Many people have abandoned I’tikaaf though the Prophet never abandoned it from the time he arrived in Madinah until he died.

Supplication: In the verses dealing with fasting, Allaah said:

“And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me, then answer them, I am indeed near to them. I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me.” [2:18 6]

This is an encouragement for the fasting person to increase his invocation. The Prophet said:

“*Three invocations will be answered: That of the fasting person,*

the oppressed, and the traveller.” [Muslim]

Repentance: Ramadaan is a time of repentance, of returning to Allaah, and when many people are saved from Hellfire every night by the grace of Allaah.

Applying oneself in all good deeds in the last days:

Aa’ishah (ra) said: “*When the last ten days came, he (saw) would pray most of the night and wake his family, and apply himself, and tighten up his loincloth”, and she also said: “He (saw) used to strive in the last days of Ramadaan more than he did during the other days.*” [Muslim]

Abstaining from vain talk:

Sins decrease the reward of fasting but do not annul it. He (saw) said, “*Fasting is not [only] leaving eating and drinking, but abstaining from vain and obscene talk, so if someone insulted or wronged you, say: ‘I am fasting.’”* [al-Hakeem]

“*Whoever does not abandon lying, then Allaah does not need him to abandon his food and drink.*” [Bukhaaree]

COMMON ERRORS MADE DURING RAMADAAN

Excessive spending: Ramadaan should be a time to avoid being wasteful, learning to be prepared for harder times, by distinguishing needs from luxuries. Unfortunately, many people go beyond their limits to spend during Ramadaan.

Staying awake at night and sleeping during the day:

Ramadaan is not a time of being lazy, otherwise it does not allow the full benefit from the experience of fasting. It is as if they have inverted nights into days and vice versa. In addition, some may spend a great portion of the night indulging in eating and drinking and socialising.

Spending more time in socialising:

As people invite others more often during Ramadaan, they tend to

spend more time socialising. While it is good to feed the fasting person, this should not result in precious time lost in vain talk. Use the occasion for remembering Allaah and offering additional prayers, and for Da'wah to Allaah.

Reading Qur'aan too fast:

Although reading the Qur'aan many times is desirable, this should not be done hastily, especially during the Taraaweeh prayer, without pondering upon its meaning. Allaah said:

— **“This is a Book which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its verses,”** [38:29]

Socialising in I'tikaaf:

Many people are eager to do i'tikaaf but some confine themselves in the masjid not to pray and worship Allaah but to talk and socialise. The ways of doing good are numerous in Ramadaan. Many people try to perform more than they are able to. By going beyond their capabilities, they end up not performing any deed in

the desired way.

Scholars and those who call to Islam should assume a more prominent role in educating the people - both by talking to them and by giving the best example in their behaviour, which should comply to the Shari'ah and Sunnah. The Muslim should realise that his priorities dictate that he does what benefits him in the Hereafter and should not put worldly interests first. We ask Allaah to accept our fast and our good deeds.

THE POWER OF DU'AA

In a time when Muslims are barely managing their Salaah, the du'aa seems extinct. Perhaps it is because we are ignorant of how powerful the du'aa is and how much it can do for us, that we let it pass us by.

‘Nothing is more honourable to Allaah, The Most High, than du'aa.’

‘The most excellent worship is du'aa.’

‘Nothing repels Divine Decree but du'aa, and nothing increases in life's span but piety.’

‘If one does not ask Allaah, He will get angry with him.’

‘The most incapable person is the one who does not make du'aa, and the most miserly person is the one who does not give salaam.’ [Saheeh al-Jaami]

Allaah (swt) is waiting for our du'aas, He (swt) says,

‘Your Lord says, ‘Call on Me and I will answer you’’ [Surah Mu'min:60]

We are also told:

‘Verily your Lord is the One Modest and Generous, and when His servant raises his hands to Him in supplication, He is diffident from returning them empty.’ [Ahmad, Abu Daawood, Tirmidhee]

Do we need further encouragement? What is it that prevents us from making du'aa? We have so much to ask for and so much to gain through it.

ETIQUETTES FOR DU'AA

When making, du'aa, certain etiquettes must be observed:

- Ask with absolute resolve, believe with certainty that the du'aa will be answered.

- One should persevere in making du'aa. Make du'aa in every condition - hardship and ease.
- Du'aa should be directed to Allaah alone.
- One should use the most beautiful Names of Allaah
- One should confess ones sins to Allaah.
- One should show humility, entreaty, desire and fear.
- One can make reference to previous good deeds.
- Du'aa should be repeated three times.
- One must send salutations upon the Prophet (saw) - du'aas are suspended until this is done. [Saheeh al-Jaami]
- One should face the Qiblah, raise both hands and have ablution
- One should show need for Allaah's help.

Some of the best times to supplicate besides the well-known ones (Laylat-ul-Qadr, last 3rd part of the night, during the Salaah, and on the day of 'Arafah etc.) are:

- At the time of adhaan and between it and the iqamah
- On Friday, late after 'Asr [Sahih al-Jami' 8402]
- Du'aa when it is raining [Abu Daawood]
- Three types of du'aa are undoubtedly granted: a parent's du'aa for his children, du'aa of a fasting person, and du'aa of the traveller. [Abu Daawood]

Acceptance of a du'aa is a great blessing from Allaah, but sometimes it may not happen and that too can be a blessing. One may think his benefit lies in marrying a particular woman for example and he makes du'aa to Allaah to facilitate this. However, with time he realises that his du'aa has not been answered. It is very likely that this marriage was bad for him in the Sight of Allaah. Therefore non acceptance of a du'aa may also be good. Allaah may use the du'aa to prevent a bad thing happening to that person or it may be deposited as a reward for him. [Tirmidhee]

THE VIRTUE OF READING QUR'AAN AT NIGHT

The Prophet (saw) said,
“Fasting and the Qur’aan will intercede for a person on the Day of Resurrection. Fasting will say, ‘O Lord, I deprived him of his food and desires during the day, so let me intercede for him.’ The Qur’aan will say, ‘I deprived him of his sleep at night, so let me intercede for him’. Then they will intercede.” [Ahmad]

He (saw) said, “There should be no envy except in two cases; a man to whom Allaah teaches the Qur’aan, so he recites it during the night and day, and his neighbour hears him and says, ‘Would that I had been given what so and so has been given and I could do what he does, and a man to whom Allaah gives wealth, so he spends it all for the sake of truth, and a man says, ‘Would that I had been given what so and so has been given and I could do what he does’.” [Bukhaaree]

Reading the Qur’aan at night saves one from negligence, as the Prophet (saw) said,
“Whoever reads ten verses at night will not be recorded as one of the negligent.” [Al-Hakeem]

The Prophet (saw) said,
“Whoever observes their prescribed salaah regularly will not be recorded as one of the negligent, and whoever reads 100 verses a night will be recorded as one of the devout.” [Ibn Khuzaymah & Al-Hakeem]

Allaah has described the pious as follows:

‘They used to sleep but little by night (invoking their Lord and praying, with fear and hope). And in the hours before dawn, they were (found) asking (Allaah) for forgiveness.’ [51:17-18]

[By Shaykh Muhammad al-Muhajjid]

THE VIRTUES OF PRAYER

- The 5 daily prayers and one Jumu’ah to the next Jumu’ah serve as an expiation (for the sins) committed between them, so long as no major sins were committed. [Muslim]
- Upon you is to perform many and frequent prostrations to Allaah (in Salaah), for indeed you do not perform a single prostration to Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, except that Allaah raises you by a level and blots out a sin of yours by virtue of it.” [Muslim]
- Whoever performs his wudhoo in his house, then walks to a house from amongst the houses of Allaah in order to fulfil an obligation from amongst the obligations of Allaah, then for each step he takes, a sin will be effaced with one step and his (ranking in Paradise) increased by a level with the next step. [Muslim]
- The most superior prayer after the obligatory prayer is the night prayer [Muslim]
- Purity is half of faith, (the statement) *al-Hamdulillaah* fills the scales, (the statement) *Subhaanallaah wal-Hamdulillaah* fills what is between the heavens and the earth. Prayer is a light, charity is a proof, patience is a glow and the Qur’aan is a proof for or against you. Every person wakes up in the morning with his soul to trade, either he sets it free or seals its destruction.” [Muslim]
- The two raka’ah (sunnah) of Fajr are better than the entire world and what it contains [Muslim]
- The most beloved action to Allaah is Prayer at its time [Bukhaaree & Muslim]
- Congregational prayer is superior to the prayer of one of you praying alone by 25 portions (in another narration it is 27 times more superior) [Bukhaaree & Muslim]
- Whoever goes to the Masjid, or returns, Allaah will prepare a feast for him in Paradise each time he goes or returns. [Bukhaaree & Muslim]
- The one who prays before the rising of the sun (Fajr) or before its setting (‘Asr), will never enter the Fire [Muslim]
- Whoever prays at the two cool periods (Fajr and ‘Asr) will enter Paradise [Bukhaaree & Muslim]
- Abu ad-Darda (ra) reported: “My close friend enjoined upon me three things that I would never leave for as long as I live: To fast 3 days of every month, the prayer of ad-Duhaa, and that I should not go to sleep before performing the Witr prayer” [Muslim]
- Whoever preserves and safeguards 4 rak’ahs before Dhuhr and 4 after it, Allaah will make him forbidden for the Fire [Abu Daawood, Tirmidhee, Nasaa’ee, Ibn Maajah]
- There is no Muslim servant who prays 12 optional rak’ahs for Allaah every day, other than the obligatory rak’ahs, except that Allaah would build a house for him in Paradise [Muslim]
- Allaah effaces the sins of one who prays the 5 daily prayers just like one who bathed 5 times a day would have no trace of dirt on him [Muslim]