

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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Ramadan: fasting for the body and feasting for the soul

[Quran 2:183] O you who believe, fasting is decreed for you, as it was decreed for those before you, that you may attain salvation.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Observing this month is one of the five pillars of Islam (Submission to God). In observing this month, as our body experiences fasting, our soul can be nourished. In this article we will be discussing why and how we observe this month followed by personal reflections on this practice.

Why observe Ramadan?

As the verse above indicates, the practice of fasting is vital for our salvation. There is tremendous wisdom in this practice, some of which will be discussed here.

Historically, it was during this month that the Quran was revealed. Quran provides guidance, teachings and the book of law (Quran 2:185). Observing this month is a way of glorifying God and showing our appreciation for guidance. Thus, this is the spirit of observing this month: glorification and appreciation of our Most Gracious

Creator.

In addition, this practice has many benefits, some of which are explained later in the section entitled "Other benefits of Ramadan".

How do we observe Ramadan?

It is simple: during this month, one fasts from dawn to sunset, abstaining from drinking, eating and sex (2:187). One can eat and drink before dawn and after sunset. Some individuals wake up before dawn to eat and drink before starting their fast. For the last ten nights of Ramadan, some people choose to retreat to the masjid. Sexual intercourse is allowed (between spouses) during the nights except while retreating in the masjid (2:187).

God allows substituting fasting during other days of the year (instead of during Ramadan) if someone is sick or traveling. In this case the fasting should be for same number of days (2:184-185).

If one experiences great difficulty in fasting, one can feed at least one poor individual for each day that one does not fast. This is the minimum. God encourages doing more righteous

works. God also encourages fasting by saying that it is the best option (2:184).

We are very blessed to have such a compassionate God who gives us options.

Other benefits of Ramadan

This month is a training for the soul. To observe this month, we alter our daily routine. Our soul takes charge and directs the body as to when to eat and drink. Observing this month can help us remember and implore God more as we fast during the day. We can implore God to help us make it through the day and make it easy. We nourish and strengthen our soul as we follow God's guidance to observe this month and as we remember and implore God. Fasting can help us appreciate the great blessing of having access to good, clean food and water. It can enhance our compassion for others who don't have these blessings and our motivation to help them, God willing.

It seems to me that this practice can help us overcome a great obstacle to salvation: our ego. As we fast during the day, we witness our weakness and dependence on food and water. This

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practice can encourage us to depend more on God to get through the day. Thus, this practice can be humbling and purifying for the soul. Fasting can encourage us to slow down and that facilitates reflection. We can become more aware of our thoughts and thought patterns. As we become aware, we have the possibility of change. We can seek refuge in God when we have negative thoughts and not harbor them. We can implore God to help us and do our part to dwell in good positive thoughts. With a slower pace and spiritual focus, we can also become more aware of our behavior. This practice presents the opportunity to see ourselves more clearly and to reform for the better.

Thus, this practice can train, strengthen and purify our soul. As we fast, our soul can grow by following God's guidance and remembering and imploring Him more as we observe this month.

Personal reflections and sharing

As we progress on our faith journey and our soul becomes stronger, fasting during Ramadan can become much easier. Therefore, if it is difficult to fast, there is hope. As we transform, our experiences including fasting can also transform. As an example, by God's grace fasting is a lot easier for me now compared to when I started observing Ramadan.

In the past I was concerned about Ramadan and fasting, especially during workdays. After experiencing how God has helped me and made it much easier now, I trust that God will get me through it. I also know that it is a very blessed month with many benefits and a good opportunity to focus more on the soul.

Other than the guideline to fast from dawn to sunset, God gives us the freedom to choose how to go about it, including what to eat and how much to eat. Of course, we want to avoid the few prohibited items and eat and drink in moderation, as discussed in

the Quran. We want to use our faculties to choose well. When possible, eating good nutritious food is helpful. We may have different preferences and needs. I would like to share some things that I have found to be helpful, by God's grace, in case they are helpful for others. Sleep (during the night or day when possible) can be helpful as long as it does not interfere with growing our soul and fulfilling our obligations. Of course, we want to hydrate and nourish our bodies during the night. At the same time, we don't want to overdo it and overwhelm our bodies. It's good to eat and drink in moderation (7:31). Our kidneys conserve water so we may not need as much as we may think. This is key: to eat and drink to fulfill our needs and not overdo it. For this it is helpful to tune into the body and take cues from it. Eating slowly and mindfully can help us appreciate and enjoy the food and avoid overeating. Fruits, vegetables and other foods with fiber can help avoid constipation. It's good to have water nearby (for example in a water bottle or thermos) to drink during the night in a way that doesn't interfere with sleep.

One of the blessings of observing Ramadan is the marvelous feeling that comes with breaking fast. For me, drinking that water after a day of fasting and feeling it go down my throat is a great feeling. After fasting, one may appreciate and enjoy good food and drink more rather than taking them for granted. Ramadan is a reminder of the blessing of having easy access to food and eating lunch the rest of the year. It is important to appreciate that we have food and can eat it. Inherent in this process of eating are the blessings of being able to chew the food and swallow it. We can also reflect more on the marvels of the food we eat. When possible, it can be a wonderful experience to break fast with others, share reflections and enjoy God's abundant provisions together.

This is a special month, and it seems that our kind and compassionate Cre-

ator provides support during this month that makes it easier to fast. Others have observed that it is much harder to make up days of fasting at other times of the year. The last ten nights of Ramadan are even more special, and the Night of Destiny (NOD) is exceptional. God swears by the last ten nights and tells us the NOD is awesome (89:1-5, 97:2-3).

In summary, Ramadan is a gift like the other practices prescribed by our Creator. It can help to nourish, strengthen and purify our souls. Thus, as our body fasts, our soul can feast.

Farinaz

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RAMADAN / REMEMBRANCE

God reminds us that we must remember Him: [2:152] *You shall remember Me, that I may remember you, and be thankful to Me; do not be unappreciative.* Every chance we get to remember our Creator is a blessing. When God revealed Himself to Moses He was very clear: [20:14] *"I am GOD; there is no other god beside Me. You shall worship Me alone, and observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) to remember Me.*

Our Lord makes is clear how important the Contact Prayers are: [29:45] *You shall recite what is revealed to you of the scripture, and observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), for the Contact Prayers prohibit evil and vice. But the remembrance of GOD (through Salat) is the most important objective. GOD knows everything you do.* God stresses the importance of remembering Him: [7:205] *You shall remember your Lord within yourself, publicly, privately, and quietly, day and night; do not be unaware.*

Ramadan is a wonderful blessing from the Almighty as well as a test of our faith.

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[2:183] O you who believe, fasting is decreed for you, as it was decreed for those before you, that you may attain salvation.

When our thirst becomes a test, we should remember God's blessing of water. *[56:68-70] Have you noted the water you drink? Did you send it down from the clouds, or did we? If we will, we can make it salty. You should be thankful. [25:48] He is the One who sends the winds with good omens of His mercy, and we send down from the sky pure water.*

We humans must have water to survive. We also need water for our animals and our crops: *[31:10] He created the heavens without pillars that you can see. He established on earth stabilizers (mountains) lest it tumbles with you, and He spread on it all kinds of creatures. We send down from the sky water to grow all kinds of beautiful plants. [32:27] Do they not realize that we drive the water to barren lands, and produce with it crops to feed their livestock, as well as themselves? Do they not see?*

God has even blessed us with the means to store water so we will have access to it even during droughts. *[39:21] Do you not see that GOD sends down from the sky water, then places it into underground wells, then produces with it plants of various colors, then they grow until they turn yellow, then He turns them into hay? This should be a reminder for those who possess intelligence.*

As I fast daily during the month of Ramadan, I try to remember God's blessings and use this opportunity to be thankful for all the blessings God has bestowed upon me and to implore Him to continue to bless me. I pray that He will allow me to complete my fast and make it easy for me.

[2:186] When My servants ask you about Me, I am always near. I answer their prayers when they pray to Me. The people shall respond to Me and believe in

Me, in order to be guided.

Supplication: A Form of Worship [40:60] Your Lord says, "Implore Me, and I will respond to you. Surely, those who are too arrogant to worship Me will enter Gehenna, forcibly."

[20:26] "And make this matter easy for me.

May the Most Merciful bless us all with an easy and successful Ramadan.

Lory

* * * * *

Specialness of Ramadan

I'm sitting here on our old futon in the main room of our cabin up in the central New Mexico mountains. It is peaceful and quiet here and I often feel close to God, almost as close as during the Ramadan fast.

I'm thinking about Ramadan because I finished reviewing a chapter I wrote about the wonderful month of Ramadan in a book I am revising. I'm also trying to be as conscious of God before and after Ramadan as I am when I am fasting. And I know that time seems to fly by. The fast will be here sooner than I think. Additionally, much of the joy of a special time comes from the anticipation of it.

What makes Ramadan so special? That seems to me to have several possible answers:

- There has been research done on the health benefits of fasting, especially intermittent fasting like the Ramadan fast.
- Fasting during Ramadan helps me gain control over my desires to eat and drink and so strengthens my will.
- Millions of Muslims around the world fast from the earliest light of dawn until the sun sets. This gives

the fast a social quality for many, and perhaps the fact of so many people fasting at the same time strengthens Ramadan's spiritual qualities, much as praying or studying the Quran together does for me.

- So far, I have mentioned things that do not relate directly to specific scriptural verses. However, the Quran, which is the word of our Creator, tells us to fast to express our appreciation for His guidance: *[2:185] Ramadan is the month during which the Quran was revealed, providing guidance for the people, clear teachings, and the statute book. Those of you who witness this month shall fast therein. Those who are ill or traveling may substitute the same number of other days. GOD wishes for you convenience, not hardship, that you may fulfill your obligations, and to glorify GOD for guiding you, and to express your appreciation.*
 - Moreover, the Quran itself was revealed on the 27th night of this special month: *[97:1] We revealed it in the Night of Destiny.*
 - When I am fasting every time my stomach growls or my throat feels parched, I think of God. These physical things help remind me of God, so I commemorate Him more frequently (26:227, 73:8, and 76:25). *[73:8] You shall commemorate the name of your Lord, to come ever closer and closer to Him. [76:25] And commemorate the name of your Lord day and night.*
 - At the end of Ramadan, I am often blessed to observe the retreat to the mosque for the last ten nights of the month (2:187).
- Perhaps all these factors play a part in making this month a precious gift. And many more probably exist for me and for others too. Whatever the reasons, Ramadan has been my favorite time of the year since I first began to fast. I pray that it is special to you too.

Lisa

MASJID TUCSON United Submitters International

PO Box 43476 Tucson AZ 85733-3476 USA

Tel: (520) 323 7636

internet web site: www.masjiduntucson.org

e-mail: info@masjiduntucson.org (or: masjiduntucson@gmail.com)

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RAMADAN: Thanksgiving to God

Fasting in Arabic is called, "Siyam" or "Saum" which literally means "to be at rest." Contrary to what many people believe, fasting did not start with Muhammad. It started with prophet Abraham like other practices of Islam. All the messengers and prophets who followed Abraham, including Moses and Jesus, observed these religious practices.

[2:183] O you who believe, fasting is decreed for you, as it was decreed for those before you, that you may attain salvation.

Fasting—Blessing in Disguise

The religious practices instituted by God, such as fasting, are blessings from God. If we can practice our religious duties the way we are supposed to, we get many benefits. Furthermore, these practices allow us to be more conscious of God in our lives.

The practices essentially constitute the nourishment required for the growth and development of our souls to make it to Heaven. They are for our own good. God is in no need of any of our prayers and worship.

Besides nourishing our soul, the real self, fasting also has numerous, scientifically proven benefits for our physical health and the mental well-being of our body. The time, length and nature of the fast all contribute to its overall positive effect. Fasting gives our digestive system a rest and improves our physical health. In his book, [Fasting and Eating for Health](#), Joel Fuhrman, M.D. notes that "The fast does not merely detoxify; it also breaks down superfluous tissue—fat, abnormal cells, atheromatous plaque and tumors—and releases diseased tissues and their cellular products into the circulation for elimination. Toxic or unwanted materials circulate in our bloodstream and lymphatic tissues, and are deposited in and released from our fat stores and other tissues. An important element of fasting detoxification is mobilizing the toxins from their storage areas."

Ramadan Varies Every Year

A lunar month is approximately 29.5 days, which is the time it takes for the moon to orbit the earth. Because a lunar month is, on the average, one day shorter than a solar month, a lunar year is 10-12 days shorter than a solar year. Therefore, the Month of Ramadan comes 10-12 days earlier each year. This way we get to fast when the days are very warm and long in summer as well as when they are cool and short in winter. This beautiful design by God is also a test for us to

see if we will fast regardless of the length or temperature of the days of Ramadan.

Is Moon Sighting Necessary?

God gave us scientific knowledge to determine exactly when a lunar month will begin and end. Therefore there is no need to sight the crescent of the moon to start fasting, like some traditional Muslims do. Any observatory or astronomy center should have that information for your area. Some almanacs, magazines or newspapers also report the times for the phases of the moon. To determine when one should start fasting, compare the time the new lunar month begins with the time of sunset, the beginning of a day in the Islamic calendar.

Abdullah

*[Reprinted and condensed from
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Quran app: Android, iOS, Windows

... And read the Quran from cover to cover. [73:4]

Read, in the name of your Lord, who created. [96:1]

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