



SPIRIT
OF
RAMADAN

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

SPIRIT OF RAMADAN

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Compiled by:

Prof. Farida Khanam

Dr. Naghma Siddiqi

First Published 2021

Translated and compiled from the writings of
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan by Prof. Farida Khanam

This book is copyright free and royalty free. It can be translated, reprinted, stored or used on any digital platform without prior permission from the author or the publisher. It can be used for commercial or non-profit purposes. However, kindly do inform us about your publication and send us a sample copy of the printed material or link of the digital work.

e-mail: info@goodwordbooks.com

Centre for Peace and Spirituality International

1, Nizamuddin West Market, New Delhi-110013

e-mail: info@cpsglobal.org

www.cpsglobal.org

Goodword Books

A-21, Sector 4, Noida-201301

Delhi NCR, India

e-mail: info@goodwordbooks.com

www.goodwordbooks.com

Center for Peace and Spirituality USA

2665 Byberry Road, Bensalem, PA 19020

e-mail: kkaleemuddin@gmail.com

Printed in India

CONTENTS

Foreword	05
The Message of Fasting	07
The Command of Fasting	09
The Significance of Fasting	11
Ramadan: A Month of Spiritual Activism	12
The Spirit of Ramadan	14
The Essence of Fasting	16
Fasting: A Spiritual Culture	18
The Reality of Fasting	20
Fasting: A Culture of Self-Control	21
The Significance of Sehri	23
The Spirit of Iftar	24
Iftar Invokes the Spirit of Prayer	26
Iftar and Simplicity	27
Significance of Fasting and Iftar	28
Fasting: A Training in Self-Restraint	30
Ramadan: A Month of Fasting and Prayer	31
Dua and Fasting	33
Ramadan and the Quran	34
Ramadan: A Month of Contemplation	36
Fasting: A Training in Thanksgiving and Taqwa	38
Spiritual Training during Ramadan	40
Ramadan and Desire-Management	42
Fasting: A Training in Humility	44
Fasting and Moral Discipline	45

Fasting and Character-Building	46
Fasting and Self-Discipline	48
Fasting and Self-Purification	51
Zakat: The Prescribed Charity	52
Zakat: An Annual Reminder of God's Gifts	53
Fasting Prepares Believers for the Dawah Mission	55
Zakat for Dawah Ilallah	56
Itikaf: A Spiritual Retreat during Ramadan	58
Lailatal-Qadr: Night of Destiny	61
Fasting for the Greatest Reward	62
Ramadan: A Month of Rigorous Training	63
Fasting and Eid al-Fitr	65
The Night of Reward	67
Eid al-Fitr: A Day of Thanksgiving and Sharing	68
Zakat al-Fitr	70
Eid al-Fitr: A Day of Divine Reward	72
Questions and Answers	74

FOREWORD

During the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, fasting for the whole month has been made obligatory for all Muslims. By way of explanation, the Quran tells us: “Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil” (*The Quran*, 2:183). At another place, the Quran has this to say: “He desires you to fast the whole month, so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him.” (*The Quran*, 2:185) The question is, just by abstaining from food and drink during the day, can the spirit of piety and thankfulness be inculcated? Fasting actually pertains to the spirit of the action and not to its form. Every such action has spirit as well as a form. Similarly, all obligatory rites of worship have spirit as well form. For instance, the spirit of prayer is humility. The spirit of *zakat*, almsgiving, is social service. The spirit of hajj is unity, and the spirit of fasting is *sabr*, patience. Similarly, the spirit of fasting is to learn the art of desire-management and inculcate in a believer values like God-consciousness, thankfulness and patience.

In life, as we know from experience, patience is essential. According to God’s creation plan, leading one’s life without the exercise of patience is almost impossible, for God has granted freedom to all human beings. People have the choice of either misusing their freedom or making proper use of it. When individuals exercise this God-given freedom in the wrong way, many problems are likely to be faced by their fellowmen. In such situations, therefore, keeping patience is very important.

In normal circumstances, a person leads his life according to his desires. But a human being has been settled on earth in order that he may be tested, and he will be rewarded in the Hereafter according to his good or bad deeds.

That is why God has ordained a month of fasting each year. During fasting, a believer has to temporarily eschew even lawful things, such as basic necessities of food and drink, without which he cannot survive. This is a very important training course designed to inculcate in a person the thinking that, over and above unlawful things, he should also be able to abstain from lawful things in order to fulfil God's commands. Moreover, according to a saying of the Prophet, fasting does not just mean abstaining from food and drink: fasting is, in reality, the act of abstinence from all inappropriate speech and action. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1903) In this way fasting helps one learn the art of desire-management.

It is desired that one should lead a life of thankfulness to God. The very first verse of the Quran reads: *'Al hamdulillahi Rabbil Alamin'*. (*The Quran*, 1:2) Those who utter these words mean to say: "We are grateful to God who is the Lord of the Universe."

Man is only a taker, whereas God is the Giver. But when people continue to receive all kinds of blessings uninterruptedly in this world, they become so accustomed to them that they take everything for granted, as a matter of right. They unconsciously come to feel that they are getting everything not from God but from material sources and are therefore unable to become truly grateful servants of God. For this reason, one is temporarily stopped from partaking of these blessings, so that he may be made to feel how precious these blessings are!

The present book aims to help readers to comprehend and inculcate the spirit of Ramadan in themselves. This will enable them to live a God-oriented life in this world and help them to become deserving of eternal Paradise in the world Hereafter with God's Grace.

Wahiduddin Khan

April 10, 2021

New Delhi, India

THE MESSAGE OF FASTING



The sighting of the moon on the last evening of the month of Shaban (the eighth month of the lunar calendar) marks the commencement of the month of fasting—Ramadan (the ninth month of the lunar calendar).

Fasting is a special training where one is being prepared to lead a principled life—not merely during the month of fasting, but, in fact, for the whole year round.

Sighting the moon is meant to psychologically prepare believers to be ready for the month of fasting. Seeing the moon evokes the feeling that the time has come to revolutionize their lives.

The month of fasting, starting from the evening of the 29th of Shaban (the last day of Shaban) is a period of “total activity”—a time of special religious observances. In other months, they could eat and drink anytime, hunger and thirst being their guide, but now ‘principle’ becomes their guide.

Fasting is a special training to help distinguish between what is allowed and forbidden, a preparation to lead a principled life not merely during the month of fasting but for the whole year round.

Before commencing the fast, the intention (*niyyah*) to keep the fast must be expressed. The Prophet observed: “A fast should be kept by one who has expressed his intention to do so before dawn.” (*Sunan an-Nasa’i*, Hadith No. 2343).

Fasting is a conscious act, not a mere ritual. It is performed with full consciousness of its implications—the mark of a truly religious person. Sehri is the meal eaten before commencing the fast. The Prophet asked his companions to eat Sehri, calling this a blessing. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1923) The Prophet invited a

companion to partake of Sehri saying “Have the blessed Sehri.” (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 2344) Another companion says, “Once I went to the Prophet before dawn and he was eating Sehri. The Prophet observed: ‘Sehri is a blessing bestowed on you by God, so you should partake of it.’” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23142)

Fasting gives a strong powerful lesson that you have to abstain from all the things God has forbidden you, however much it may go against your wishes.

Eating Sehri before dawn is a reminder that when God gives us a difficult command, He also grants some concessions along with it. Together with the command of fasting, God gives the concession of Sehri. Any commandment of God, however difficult, requires absolute trust in Him.

Routine daily activities go on but in a state of fasting; the difference being that the same activities are now conducted with a new frame of mind. The one who fasts now performs prayers, studies the Quran, remembers God, and deals with people during the course of the day. These routine activities are performed with a spiritual state of mind, giving them the status of spiritual acts.

Sunset is the time for breaking the fast. As he does so, he thanks God with the following words of prayer used by the Prophet: “May the Lord be thanked and praised with Whose help I was able to fast, and now I am breaking the fast with the food and drink that He has provided. May God accept it. He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.” (*Kanzul Ummal*, Hadith No. 18057 and 18058).

This prayer expresses the feelings that surge within a believer while breaking his fast.

THE COMMAND OF FASTING



The command to fast has been given in detail in the Quran. We quote here the relevant verses:

“Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil. Fast for a specified number of days, but if any one among you is ill or on a journey, let him fast the same number of days later. For those who can fast only with extreme difficulty, there is a way to compensate—the feeding of a needy person. But he who does good of his own accord shall be well rewarded; but to fast is better for you, if you only knew.”

“The month of Ramadan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is present in that month, let him fast; but he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on. God desires ease for you, not hardship. He desires you to fast the whole month, so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him.

“When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.

“It has been made lawful for you to go to your wives on the night of the fast: they are like a garment for you, and you are like a garment for them. God is aware that you were deceiving yourselves and He has turned in mercy towards you and pardoned you. So you may now consort with them and seek what God has ordained for you. Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black. Then resume the fast until nightfall, and do not approach them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques. These are the limits set by God, so do not approach them. Thus He makes clear His commandments to mankind, so that they may guard themselves [against evil].” (*The Quran*, 2:183-187)

This is the basic commandment regarding fasting. It has been further elaborated upon in the Hadith and the Fiqh. In the books of Hadith, a number of traditions have been collected under the chapter sawm, which show different aspects of the rite of fasting.

According to Abu Huraira, the Prophet of Islam once observed: 'When any one of you is fasting, he should refrain from all indecencies. He should not raise his voice. If anyone fights with him or abuses him, he should not retaliate, but simply say that he is fasting.' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1894)

This tradition tells us about the actual spirit of fasting, which is to abstain from all those things that God has forbidden. The command to refrain from consuming food and drink during the month of Ramadan is, in actual fact, a practical lesson in doing so. Food and water is the last thing that one may be asked to refrain from. Putting a curb on man's basic necessities is to give a strongly worded lesson—that the things God has forbidden you must be eschewed, however contrary that might be to your tastes and habits. This should be done, even if it involves doing without your most basic requirements.

Another tradition is recorded in these words: "The Prophet of Islam said that when a person who was on a fast was abused, he should say in return, "Peace be upon you, I am not the one to return abuse for abuse." For such a person God has this to say: "My servant took refuge in fasting for someone's evil; so I also gave him refuge from hellfire." (*Tartib al-Amaliyah li Shajari*, Hadith No. 1348)

The goal of fasting is, therefore, to develop in man the ability to lead his life bound by restrictions, rather than lead a totally unfettered life.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FASTING



During the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, fasting for the whole month has been made obligatory for all Muslims. By way of explanation, the Quran tells us: “Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil.” (*The Quran*, 2:183)

At another place, the Quran has this to say: “He desires you to fast the whole month, so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him.” (*The Quran*, 2:185) The question arises as to how, just by abstaining from food and drink during the day, can the spirit of piety and thankfulness be inculcated? Fasting actually pertains to the spirit of the action and not to its form. Every such action has spirit and not just form. Similarly, all obligatory rites of worship have spirit as well form. For instance, the spirit of prayer is humility. The spirit of *zakat*, almsgiving, is social service. The spirit of hajj is unity, and the spirit of fasting is *sabr*, patience.

In life, as we know from experience, patience is essential. According to God's creation plan, leading one's life without the exercise of patience is almost impossible, for God has granted freedom to all human beings. People have the choice of either misusing their freedom or making proper use of it. When individuals exercise this God given freedom in the wrong way, many problems are likely to be faced by their fellowmen. It is in such situations that keeping patience is important.

In normal circumstances, a person leads his life according to his desires. But a human being has been settled on earth in order that he may be tested, and he will be rewarded in the Hereafter according to whether his deeds have been good or bad.

That is why God has ordained a month of fasting each year. During fasting, a believer has to temporarily eschew even lawful things, such as the basic necessities of food and drink, without which he cannot survive. This is a very important training course designed to inculcate in a person the thinking that, over and above unlawful things, he should also be able to abstain from lawful things in order to fulfil God's commands. Moreover, according to a saying of the Prophet, fasting does not just mean abstaining from food and drink: fasting is, in reality, the act of abstinence from all inappropriate speech and action.

It is desired that one should lead a life of thankfulness to God. The very first verse of the Quran reads: '*Al hamdulillah*'. Those who utter these words mean to say: "We are grateful to God who is the Lord of the Universe."

Man is only a taker, whereas God is the Giver. But when people continue to receive all kinds of blessings uninterruptedly in this world, they become so accustomed to them that they take everything for granted as a matter of right. They unconsciously come to feel that they are getting everything not from God but from material sources and are therefore unable to become truly grateful servants of God. For this reason, one is temporarily stopped from partaking of these blessings, so that he may be made to feel how precious these blessings are!

RAMADAN: A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM



Ramadan is a month of spiritual activism when devotees try to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings. *Roza* is for personality and intellectual development. This is done by desire-management, experiencing helplessness and connecting to God with true prayers. This should become the way of life for

the whole year. This makes observing *rozās* the most rewardable act and not the mere act of abstaining from food and water.

The spirit of Ramadan is the spirit of abstinence. In Arabic, fasting is known as 'Saum' meaning abstinence. Abstaining from food and drink during the month of Ramadan is aimed to awaken the 'sawm spirit' of the believer.

Food and drink are two of man's basic necessities. These are the last things one should be asked to abstain from. Asking a person to abstain from them is like giving a strong and powerful message that you have to abstain from all the things God has forbidden you, much as this may go against your wishes. A fast which is devoid of the sawm spirit will not be acceptable to God or be rewarded.

There are many *Abadith* (plural of Hadith—words of the Prophet) highlighting the importance of the spirit of Ramadan. According to a Hadith, God does not accept the fast of one who does not desist from lying and dishonest practices. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1903)

Another Hadith tells us that, "The fasting person if abused or provoked should not retaliate. True fasting acts as a shield for evils. God will shield such a person from hellfire." (*Sunan An-Nasa'i*, Hadith No. 2234)

The above Hadith tells us that when one is faced with evil, one should return good for evil. God does not accept the fast of one who does not desist from lying and dishonest practices. In this way fasting saves us from negative psychology, inculcates positive thinking and enables us to stay calm even when provoked.

According to another tradition of the Prophet of Islam, *Ramadan* is the month of patience. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20323). It does not aim at mere abstinence from food and water but is to reinforce the virtue of patience and not to blindly follow one's desires. God has given free will to test if man can use his freedom properly. There is a Hadith, a believer is like a tethered horse that moves only as far as its rope allows (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 11335).

One needs to tie oneself willingly with the rope of God's laws. Thus, one who fasts, imposes self-discipline and surrenders to the will of God.

The rationale behind fasting for a month is made clear by psychological studies. It tells us that thirty days are required for a habit to be inculcated. It is not an overnight miracle but a lengthy process. The practice becomes a part of the personality only when it is observed every day for at least thirty days, and it is only then that it may continue for at least a year. In this way Ramadan is the month of awakening spiritual activism within oneself.

THE SPIRIT OF RAMADAN



The commencement of Ramadan is marked by the 9th month of the Hijri calendar. Roza, the term for fasting, is kept for one full month. Roza begins at dawn (*Sehri*) during which people consume food and water and after which they are not to partake of any of this for the rest of the day till the roza breaks at dusk (*Iftaar*). This schedule has to be followed for the entire month of Ramadan. According to the Quran, there are two purposes of fasting: One, to make one cautious in life and two, to make one thankful to God (*The Quran*, 2:183, 185).

Food and drink is man's most basic necessity. When he is consumed by hunger and thirst, he sees how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of the succour of God. It is when man experiences this helplessness made manifest during the times when he feels hunger and thirst, that his true self meets God. Thus, it is the discovery of the real benefactor that brings along with it immense pleasure and satisfaction.

This experience makes him aware of his duties as God's humble servant. This feeling leads to caution in life. Then in the evening, when he eats and drinks, he sees how God has made complete provision for his needs. His heart is filled with gratitude. He praises God and offers thanks to Him.

Fasting is therefore an opportunity or the meeting point between man and God. This meeting point is the last stage of helplessness, which makes you realize that God is all-powerful, and man is helpless. Fasting awakens in man the feeling of acknowledgement and gratefulness to God. The temporary deprivation of food and water stresses the importance of these things as divine blessings. It reminds man that all he has is from God, who is the supreme and all-powerful and one day all would be taken away from him. Man is here for a test. It breaks one's arrogance and stubbornness. Fasting makes man realize the reality of life, that is, his helplessness. Man is cut to size. It creates a practical situation when one prays truly from the heart knowing how completely he is dependent on God. Such prayers connect him with the Almighty.

There is, however, much more to fasting than the caution and gratitude induced by the purely outward, physical forms of abstention. It's greater significance lies in its symbolism of an inner, spiritual eagerness to make all kinds of sacrifices.

Obviously, one who refrains from taking food and water on specific days, but who goes throughout his life without any qualm about telling lies, persecuting his fellow men, thwarting justice, and so on, has missed the whole point of the fast of Ramadan. He has concerned himself all along with outward forms and not with inner realities. Such a man cannot expect to find favour in the eyes of his fellow men and will certainly incur the wrath of God, his Maker.

One who fasts in all sincerity takes care to cast his entire life in the one consistent mould. In all of his affairs, he applies the constraints laid down by God. He checks himself from abusing others, stays his hand from persecution and halts in his steps towards injustice.

As the Prophet said, “Such a man can be likened to a tied-up horse which can go only as far as its rope permits: in that way, he cannot transgress.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 11335)

THE ESSENCE OF FASTING



Fasting is prescribed once a year, in the month of Ramadhan. One fasts every day of the month, from the first light of dawn until sundown. During that time, one abstains completely from food and drink. According to the Quran, there are two purposes of fasting (*The Quran*, 2:183, 185): Firstly, to make one cautious in life and secondly, to make one thankful to God.

Food and drink is man's most basic necessity. When he is consumed by hunger and thirst, he sees how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of the succour of God. This experience makes him aware of his duties as God's humble servant. This feeling leads to caution in life. Then in the evening, when he eats and drinks, he sees how God has made complete provision for his needs. His heart is filled with gratitude. He praises God and offers thanks to Him.

The Prophet of Islam is reported as saying that God rewards good deeds from tenfold to seven hundred-fold. His reward for fasting, which is especially for Him, will be infinite. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1151) In another Hadith he is reported as saying, “There are many who fast and receive nothing in return, but hunger and thirst.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1690 | *Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 8856)

What is the difference between one fast and another, while in appearance both are alike? In actual fact, the appearance is not all that there is to it. The act serves only as a symbol of the essence.

One who observes fasting in its essence as well as in its outward form, will deserve the promised reward. On the other hand, one who attaches importance to symbols alone, will have nothing to his credit when he comes before God. Fasting of the second type is of no value in the eyes of God, since the true value of something which is symbolic in its nature is always determined by the virtue which it represents.

The outward form of fasting is to abstain from food and water. This abstinence symbolizes the fact that man is at God's disposal. He should, therefore, be willing, at all times, to sacrifice anything for His sake, even if it involves relinquishing such basic necessities as food and water.

Obviously one who refrains from taking food and water on specific days but does not do likewise regarding other things forbidden by God, like telling lies, persecuting his fellowmen, perpetrating injustice and so on, mistakes the symbols for the essence, appearance for reality. Such a man cannot expect to deserve a reward from God.

The essence of fasting thus is to eschew all evil ways throughout the year. The true fast is that from which one learns a lesson in self-discipline. Prophet Muhammad once said that one who keeps a fast but does not stop lying or practicing wrong ways then God does not need him to leave his food. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1689) The term 'leave' in this tradition actually refers to the symbolic leaving of wrong practices.

According to a Hadith, two women kept fast and then sat down and started backbiting (Ghibat). The Prophet said that these people had kept the fast with a legitimate thing (food and water) but broke it with an illegitimate thing (Ghibat). (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23653)

Fasting is a special deed. It makes a man kind-hearted and enables him to awaken his finer feelings. He is then able to feel and experience what God desires of a man in this world.

Fasting, a form of training to create the capacity in a man to become the most devoted worshipper, makes him most grateful to God and creates a fear of Him, which makes him shiver. The very hardship of fasting carries a man from the material world to the plain of spirituality.

One who keeps such a real fast is that of one whose whole life is cast in the same consistent mould: who applies in all his affairs, the constraints and bounds that God has laid down, who checks his tongue from abusing others, who stays his hand from persecution, who halts in his steps towards injustice. As the Prophet said, "Such a man can be likened to a horse tied to his rope, who moves only as far as his string permits him. He cannot transgress." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 11335)

FASTING: A SPIRITUAL CULTURE



According to Islamic teachings, Ramadan, the ninth month of the Hijra calendar, is the month of fasting. In this month, believers refrain from food and drink for a limited period each day, that is, from dawn till sunset. They eat and drink during the night. This practice continues for one month.

What is fasting? Fasting does not simply amount to observing hunger for a temporary period. In fact, it symbolizes a lifelong culture, that is, a culture of dedication. According to Islamic ideology, a believer is a man of mission. A man of mission is a different person. He has little time for anything other than his mission. He eschews all such activities as are irrelevant to his mission. This is the spirit of the man of mission and fasting symbolizes this spirit.

The Arabic equivalent of fasting is *sawm*, which means abstinence. Abstinence is the gist of fasting. When one involves himself in a mission, that is, of spreading the word of God, he has no time, except for fulfilling his bare necessities. This is the mission culture. Abstaining oneself from food and water for a limited period is symbolic training. This practice prepares one to lead a life of dedication to one's mission.

Fasting during the month of Ramadan reminds a faithful person that if the list of abstinence were to reach the extent of refraining from food and water for a temporary period, then he would be ready to do so for a higher purpose. Although this training is for a temporary period, it enables one to lead one's whole life in accordance with this spirit.

For a faithful person, living for the divine cause is his mission. All other things become secondary for him. This kind of focused life is also a great source of spirituality. A person, who controls his material life and devotes himself for a higher cause, also inculcates in himself what is called spirituality. In terms of external form, he refrains himself from material things, but in terms of inner content, he inculcates spirituality in his personality. Fasting makes one a spiritual person.

Fasting is not a set of rituals. It is rather adopting the well-known formula—simple living, high thinking. Fasting helps one to adopt this formula. Simple living refrains one from distraction, and high thinking is only the other name for a distraction-free life. And, when one saves oneself from distraction, the result, undoubtedly, is high thinking.

THE REALITY OF FASTING



The Quran states, "... whoever of you is present in that month, let him fast; but he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on. God desires ease for you, not hardship. He desires you to fast the whole month, so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him." (*The Quran*, 2:185)

The word 'grateful' is related to fasting in the above verse of the Quran. Fasting, essentially, serves as training in inculcating the spirit of thanksgiving in a believer. Food and water are great blessings of God, yet man is incapable of attaching due importance to them. While fasting, he goes hungry and thirsty the whole day, then at sunset, in a state of extreme hunger and thirst, he eats and drinks to his fill. He then realizes through his own experience how great are the blessings of God which are present in the form of food and water. This experience produces boundless feelings of gratitude towards his Lord in a person.

Fasting in the whole month of Ramadan means abstaining from food and drink for the whole of every day of that month. For eleven months of the year, man experiences what food and drink are and for one month of the year he experiences what it is like to not eat or drink. It is the experience of a life without food, after a life with food. It is the experience of a disciplined life after a life of freedom.

Food is the symbol of God having built a great life-support system in this world especially for man. In this vast universe, there are innumerable stars and planets, but this life support system is found only on the earth. The month of fasting is, in fact, a reminder of this great blessing.

The month of fasting reminds us that without this life support system, man would be completely helpless. He would experience the ultimate state of helplessness. Then there would be no water on earth for him to drink. There would be no food for him to eat. There would be no oxygen for him to breathe. There would be no sunlight to light his path. There would be no gravity to enable him to build his civilization. The month of Ramadan reminds man of the importance of the life support system, so that he is filled with gratitude to God.

Fasting (*roza*) reminds man that without this life support system the whole of life would be destroyed. Therefore, fasting brings about both the feeling of being God-fearing and the feeling of being grateful. Undoubtedly, another name for Islam is to live with these feelings.

FASTING: A CULTURE OF SELF-CONTROL



Fasting, in some form or the other, is part of every religion as given in the following verse of the Quran, “Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil.” (*The Quran*, 2:183)

In Islam fasting is called *roza*. The Arabic equivalent of *roza* is *sawm*. *Sawm* literally means abstinence, that is, to refrain from doing something). The ninth month of the Hijri calendar, that is, Ramadan, has been especially chosen for fasting. Fasting during the month of Ramadan is obligatory for every Muslim, except when he has a genuine reason not to do so.

In every human being there are two faculties to take into consideration: one is desire and the other is reason.

In all matters, the individual has to decide whether to follow his desire or his reason. The great merit in fasting is that it trains men and women to refrain from following their desires and instead always to bow to reason. That is the spirit of *sawm*.

According to a saying of the Prophet of Islam, one who fasts should never stoop to using abusive language; if someone abuses him, he should simply say 'I am fasting.' (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith No. 2363) Islamic fasting, as far as formal practice is concerned, is to abstain from food and drink. But the actual spirit of fasting is to refrain from indulging in negative thinking and the use of negative language.

Self-control, far from being a negative or passive action, has great value in human behaviour. In life, there are more than fifty-per cent occasions when one should refrain from action, and less than fifty-per cent occasions when one should act. This is the formula for success for both individuals and society.

Self-control is integral to social ethics. If you live alone on an island, there is no need for any control, as the absence of others leaves you free to do whatever you want to do. However, when you are living in a society, you have to give leeway to others. This is what every person on the road does when he drives a car: he either keeps to the left (or to the right depending upon which country he is in) so that he gives way to other cars and can carry on in his journey without accidents. This principle is applicable to the entire life of an individual. It entails giving others the chance to live their lives while living one's own life.

Self-control is a kind of mutual adjustment. When a person adopts the way of self-control, it is far-reaching in its effects. This is because in this way he promotes the culture of self-control in society and indicates to others through his actions that they should follow the path that he is following. Thus, the way of self-control leads to a

better society, while lack of self-control in individuals leads to the destruction of peace. As far as the individual is concerned, self-control serves as a means of personality development. This way of life, in turn, saves others from unnecessary problems.

There is a 'pre-control' for exercising self-control, and that is, thinking. When a person adopts a life of self-control, he first thinks about what path he should tread. Only after considerable thought, does he plan out his course of action. A life lived in this way will necessarily be marked by creative thinking. In addition, self-control contributes to one's intellectual development and turns one into a man of wisdom.

In Islam, fasting is worship. And worship is for God. But fasting is the kind of worship which at one and the same time is for the sake of God and for the sake of man. Thus, if fasting is observed in the right spirit, in all sincerity, it will make an individual pious and responsible.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEHRI



During Ramadan, the meal taken before dawn is called *Sehri*. The Prophet asked his companions to eat Sehri saying "Eat sehri because it is a blessing" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1923) The Prophet invited a companion to partake of Sehri saying "Come, eat of the blessed food." (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 2344) Another companion relates that during the month of fasting, "Once I went to the Prophet before dawn and he was eating Sehri. The Prophet observed: 'Sehri is a blessing that God has bestowed on you. So do not leave it out.'" (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23142)

Eating the pre-dawn meal is a reminder of the reality that when God gives the command for a difficult task, He at the same time makes arrangements so that there is ease in the performance of that task. God has enjoined fasting on believers, but has also allowed them to have the pre-dawn meal before the day long fast. Any commandment of God, however difficult, requires absolute trust in Him.

Similarly, God has asked the believers to perform the task of conveying the message of Islam to people. During this task He takes the responsibility of protecting the believer from those who place obstacles in his path. If God's command appears difficult to a believer, he should place his trust in God and persevere. This is because God does not only give commands but also fulfils the requirements needed to execute the command. He puts a person in a testing situation, but He also supports him throughout. He provides help for the person so that he can go through the situation he has been placed in.

The significance of *sehri* is to remind a believer of this principle: when God gives a difficult command to man, He at the same time makes arrangements so that there is ease in the performance of that task if one places complete trust in God and perseveres.

THE SPIRIT OF IFTAR



Iftar is an Arabic word, which literally means 'to break'. In the Islamic context, it means to break the fast, to eat and drink in the evening after the daylong fast. *Iftar* is not simply a matter of having dinner. It has great significance. It is a combination of spiritual and physical food.

According to Islamic teachings, there are five pillars of Islam. One of these pillars is fasting during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Fasting begins from dawn and ends at sunset. One can take food before dawn, after which one is required to maintain a total fast until sunset. After sunset, one is allowed to eat and drink according to one's choice. Taking food before dawn is called *sehri*. Taking food after sunset is called *iftar*.

Iftar is like dinner, but it is a dinner combined with a spiritual experience. It is like a compulsory form of training. When one experiences hunger in the daytime, one discovers the importance of food and water which give us energy. Indeed, one discovers the fact that one cannot live without food and water. And, after this experience, when a person takes food and water in the evening, he is filled with gratitude to God Almighty, who not only created him, but also provided him with all the basic needs, essential for his continuing existence. Fasting is like the life of this world. *Iftar* gives a glimpse of the boundless rewards that await man in the world Hereafter.

Iftar not only gives physical energy, but also becomes a source of spiritual development. This spiritual experience also inculcates in his mind the importance of philanthropy. He becomes more sensitive towards those people who are unable to meet their needs. This feeling gives him an incentive to provide assistance to such people.

In this sense, *iftar* is a source of spiritual learning. The *iftar* time becomes a time of inspiration. It is the moment when physical food is converted into spiritual food. *Iftar* not only gives physical energy, but also becomes a source of spiritual development.

According to Islamic teachings, *iftar* should be a simple meal and not a lavish affair. Simplicity saves us from distraction and makes us concentrate on the spiritual aspect of fasting. The Prophet of Islam and his Companions always used to take simple food at the time of *iftar*.

On the other hand, if the *iftar* takes the form of a lavish affair, all attention will focus on the taste and the physical aspects, and the spiritual benefits will be lost. In fact, a lavish *iftar* kills the true spirit of fasting.

Iftar ostensibly ends the time of fasting but treating it as just that would be an underestimation. For the spiritually awakened mind, it is like a new beginning towards spiritual upliftment. Such a person will analyse the experiences of the day and try to learn lessons from them.

These days, organizing *iftar* parties has become a tradition. But this party should not be like any other party. Such a party should give us an opportunity for spiritual and dawah exchange, turning our individual experience into a social and dawah experience.

IFTAR INVOKES THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER



It is reported that the Prophet of Islam used to say at the time of *iftar*, 'Thirst has been quenched, and hunger is no more, and God willing, God will bless us with His reward.' (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 2357)

This shows that *iftar* invokes the spirit of prayer. It gives us an opportunity to say, 'O God, I have fulfilled my duty and now I hope You will not deprive me of Your higher blessings.' During the fast, the pangs of hunger and thirst make a man feel vulnerable and he turns towards God with renewed zeal. He cries out, 'God, I have obeyed Your one command, there are many I could not. I kept one day's fast, but I failed on several other occasions. I seek Your special blessings.'

When a sincere prayer like this is uttered, God turns His special attention to it, and the rewards are boundless. Man prays in this

world and the reward is given in the world Hereafter. But fasting is an exception for which a taste of the reward is given in this world itself. *Iftar* gives a glimpse of the boundless rewards that await man in the world Hereafter.

IFTAR AND SIMPLICITY



Fasting symbolises a lifelong culture of dedication. The Arabic equivalent of fasting is ‘*sawm*’, which means abstinence. Abstinence is the gist of fasting. Abstinence from food and water for a limited period is symbolic training.

Fasting reminds a faithful person that if the acts of abstinence were to reach the extent of refraining from food and water for a temporary period, then he would be ready to do so for a higher purpose. Although this training is for a temporary period, it enables one to lead one’s whole life in accordance with this spirit. Fasting is the adoption of the well-known principle—simple living, high thinking.

Simplicity in one’s food habits becomes an integral part of a believer’s life. One of the teachings of the Prophet is ‘simplicity is a part of faith.’ (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 4118)

Extravagance of any kind will not be the way of a true follower of the Prophet.

Iftar is an Arabic word, which literally means ‘to break’. In the Islamic context, it means to break the fast, to eat and drink in the evening after the daylong fast. *Iftar* is a combination of spiritual and physical food.

According to Islamic teachings, *iftar* should be a simple meal and not a lavish affair.

Simplicity saves us from distraction and makes us concentrate on the spiritual aspect of fasting. On the other hand, if the *iftar* takes the form of a lavish affair, all attention will be focused on the taste and physical aspects, and the spiritual benefits will be lost. *Iftar* is an opportunity for spiritual exchange, turning our individual experiences into a social experiences.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FASTING AND IFTAR



The Prophet is reported to have said: “The fasting person has two delights: one at the time of breaking the fast and the other at the time of meeting with his Lord God most High.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1151)

Fasting, and the breaking of the fast; both are different experiences in their own right.

The reality of this life can be known through the experience of fasting. Eating, drinking and certain other specific activities are prohibited during the fast for a temporary period throughout the day. Similar prohibitions are imposed upon the true believer throughout his life. He has to abstain from all that has been forbidden by God and live life as a ‘fasting’ person.

The very purpose of life is the ‘testing’ of man. Fasting is a semblance of this test. This worldly life is only to do good deeds as enjoined by God, to follow the path He has shown and refrain from all that He has prohibited. For this conscientious life the promise of God is boundless rewards in the Hereafter; rewards which are not exposed in this worldly life. Fasting thus gives an awareness of the patience and struggle of this life. In contrast to fasting, *iftar* (breaking the fast), presents a semblance of life Hereafter.

In the same spirit, the whole month of Ramadan resembles the conditioned life of this world. Likewise, Eid al-Fitr, the day of feasting, also gives us a faint taste and semblance of the life Hereafter.

The day of the festival brings an end to the prohibitions and restrictions placed during the period of fasting. Eid reminds us of the joys and pleasures of the Hereafter for a believer who has successfully passed this worldly test.

A true believer, having undergone the period of fasting in a most sincere way, gets the feeling of the Hereafter as soon as the month of Ramadan is finished and the celebrations for Eid are under way. He feels as if he is being entertained as a guest by God Himself. From the depths of his being, his heart cries out:

‘Oh God, as you have helped me carry out the injunctions of fasting and at the culmination of the month have bestowed on me the joys of Eid, accept this life of mine as one spent in fasting and bestow on me the delights of Paradise. Write me down amongst the list of persons who have been bestowed the life of Paradise by opening thy gates of mercy.’

As fasting does not imply mere hunger and thirst, the day of the festival does not imply mere feasting and celebration. It should rather strengthen in us the right perspective of the ephemeral nature of this worldly life and the imminent delights of the life Hereafter that are sure to follow.

This should be truly manifested in the thankfulness we present to the Creator by offering prayers and also by giving more in charity to the needy. As the period of fasting was spent in self-preparation and spiritual development, the day of Eid should inculcate in the believer a new spirit and a renewed sense of zeal and determination towards the journey to the life Hereafter. The message of Eid fosters the rekindling of our faith and the opening of new vistas and an entirely fresh and innovative approach to the

struggles of life which would culminate by the grace of God with the rewards of everlasting Paradise.

FASTING: A TRAINING IN SELF-RESTRAINT



Fasting, a form of divine worship is observed for one month every year. During this period of fasting, man abstains from food and water from sunrise to sunset in obedience to the command of God. This act is performed in order to reduce man's attraction towards materialism and increase his spirituality, so that he may be able to lead a truly spiritual life in this world. In the process, he spends more time in the worship of God.

In chapter 2, verse 185, the Quran tells us that fasting awakens the feeling of gratefulness in man. The temporary deprivation of food and water stresses for him the importance of these things as divine blessings. Then when he partakes of food and water after having experienced hunger and thirst, he can feel how truly precious is the food and water provided to him abundantly by God. This experience increases manifold his feelings of gratitude to God.

Fasting produces moral discipline within man. By restricting the basic things which he desires, the devotee is trained to lead a life of self-restraint and not of permissiveness. What the speed-breaker does for the speeding motorist, fasting does for the devotee. By having a curb put on his various desires—for one month at a time, man is trained to lead a life of self-restraint for the whole year, making no attempt to exceed the limits set by God.

What man does by fasting is engage himself more and more in the remembrance and worship of God, and in the recitation of the Quran. Thus, fasting serves as a strategy to increase the

efficacy of worship. In this way God accepts our worship in its heightened form.

Fasting is, in short, a training course. Its purpose is to place man on a special spiritual plane for one month so that he may be able to lead a better life of a true devotee of God and a true lover of humanity.

RAMADAN

A MONTH OF FASTING AND PRAYER



Ramadan, the month of fasting, is a blessed spiritual period for believers, for it is during this month that they do their utmost to awaken and enhance their spirituality. The aim of fasting during Ramadan is to diminish a person's dependence on material things, so that he may elevate himself to a higher plane of devout living. Abiding by the guidelines of fasting raises believers to a state of humility, truth and honesty.

It was in the month of Ramadan that revelations of the Quran first began to be made to Prophet Muhammad. The objective of fasting has been aptly summed up in this Quranic verse: 'Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourself against evil' (2:183). Ramadan teaches the believer to uphold truth and refrain from evil and falsehood. It is important, therefore, to reflect upon the Prophet's admonition to believers: 'God does not need the fast of one who does not leave off falsity in speaking or who acts according to his false assertions.' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1903)

In a Hadith, Ramadan is called the 'month of patience'. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20323). The prescribed abstemiousness of this month is designed to train the individual to control all negative feelings, so that he may lead a successful life in this world, for it is negative feelings that place the greatest hurdle in the path of human progress. By the mere observance of a fast, he becomes conditioned to leading a life of moral restraint. As a reassurance to believers, the Quran says: "Those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure." (*The Quran*, 39:10)

According to the Prophet, "Whenever one of you is on a fast, he should be soft in his demeanour. In the event of being abused or provoked, he should simply say that he is on a fast." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1894) According to another tradition of the Prophet, "There is purification for all things, and purification of the body is fasting." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1745) Just as bathing purifies the body, so does fasting purify the soul. But it must be borne in mind that Ramadan entails much more than fasting; it is the fostering of a culture of abstinence aimed at purification of thought, speech and general behaviour.

Two things make up a human being—the body and the soul. While the material part of a person, the body is indispensable for the performance of mundane tasks, it is his soul which will raise him to higher realities. The mind, or soul, must be preserved in a state of purity. That means that just as the body requires physical nourishment, so also must the soul be spiritually nourished. Fasting entails cutting oneself off from the world and turning to God.

This turning to God is not in a physical sense, but having one's heart and mind continually directed towards God, whatever bodily activity one may be engaged in. When a person has elevated himself from the world, God endows him with wisdom, which emanates from his lips. He is shown the ills of the world, and their remedies. He is brought safely to the abode of peace.

DUA AND FASTING



While giving commands regarding fasting, the Quran makes special mention of *Dua* (remembering God). “When My servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.” (*The Quran*, 2:186)

In this world only that person finds God who surrenders himself to God. And only the words of that person reach God whose spiritual chords are linked with the chord of God. All souls are not blessed with ineffable feelings of nearness to God. This good fortune is destined only for those who possess a fine soul.

Dua is calling to God. It is not just a verbal act. In essence, it is an act of the heart. The more the heart cultivates this capability, the more effectively will *dua* come to the lips. This shows the relation between fasting and *dua*. Fasting increases the spiritual capability of man’s heart and when this capability increases, the *dua* which ensues is more precious than that of a non-fasting situation. Thus, real fasting is that which induces real *dua*.

In a tradition recorded by Imam Ahmad and Imam Al-Tirmizi, Abu Umamah has narrated the words of the Prophet: ‘My Lord offered to grant me the entire valley of Makkah which would be turned into gold. I said, “No, O my Lord: I would rather have my meal one day and remain hungry the next. And when I am hungry I will turn to You and remember You, and when I eat, I will praise You and thank You.”’ (*Al Tirmizi*, Hadith No. 2347)

This hadith shows that the right feelings are not produced without the situations being conducive. It is inevitable that man should

undergo a variety of situations, so that the desired feelings may be produced within him. In such situations, when man suffers the pangs of hunger and thirst and is overwhelmed with feelings of modesty, his heart turns to God. When he gets water to drink and food to eat, and his feelings of thirst and hunger are satisfied, he is overwhelmed with feelings of thanksgiving and praise for God.

Fasting produces patience and forbearance are what lead man to the state of the heart which enable him to experience the feeling of nearness to God. It is only then that those words come to one's lips as are held worthy of divine acceptance. Patience is the ground where the blessed tree of *dua* is grown.

The purpose of fasting is to produce a feeling of humility through thirst and hunger. Humility comes from a feeling of *inabat* (repentance), which is the spirit of prayer. When *inabat* is produced within oneself, the *dua* which comes out of one's lips, goes straight to the throne of the Almighty.

RAMADAN AND THE QURAN



The Quran makes special mention of its revelation in the month of Ramadan, while making it obligatory upon the followers. This indicates that there is a close link between Ramadan and the Quran. In the words of the Quran:

“The month of Ramadan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is present in that month, let him fast; but he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on.”
(*The Quran*, 2:185)

The revelation of the Quran started in 610 A.H. in the month of Ramadan according to the lunar calendar. The first revelation was made to the Prophet of Islam when he was in the cave of Hira, near Makkah and it continued for the next twenty-three years, finally reaching completion in Madinah.

The guidance given in the Quran is the best blessing to mankind from God, because it shows man the path to ultimate success. It tells man how to conduct himself so that in his eternal life he can gain entry into paradise. Paradise is the goal of man. Fasting is the path to it.

The month of Ramadan is the annual reminder of this blessing. The celebration of the revelation of the Quran is not observed in the usual way but by abstinence and being thankful to the Almighty. Fasting in this month is acknowledgment of the divine blessings. It is like saying, 'O Lord I have heard, and I accept it.'

Also, this is a month during which the Quran should be read and understood. The Quran is specially recited in this month. This reading is not only meant as recitation of the words of the Quran but is aimed at delving into the deeper meaning of the Quran and understanding its message. During this time, one finds time to reflect on one's life, one's past and present, and what course to follow in the future. In the night the Quran is also recited during *tarawih*. This means he must undertake introspection and read the Quran more deeply.

In this way fasting inclines one to become a student of the Quran and, by seriously studying the Quran, one discovers those principles by which one may develop one's personality and become a positive thinker in the full sense. The study and contemplation on the Quran is like taking a spiritual bath by making oneself a more awakened person.

This month has been made special so that the blessings of God may be counted even more. When the Quran is read during the month of its revelation, it reminds us of the time when the divine

light from heaven fell upon the earth. Man remembers this and cries out, ‘O Lord, fill my heart with your divine light!’ He cries out, ‘Make me among those who are near you!’ When he reads about Hell and Paradise, his inner self cries out, ‘O Lord, save me from Hell, and let me enter Paradise.’

In this way the Quran becomes a guiding force in man’s life. He earns his livelihood according to its dictates. He bathes in the ocean of its life to cleanse his soul.

The Quran is a reward to His servants from God. And fasting is an acknowledgment of the reward. Through fasting man makes himself worthy of being thankful to God. He obeys the command of God and thus revels in the supremacy of God. Having gone through a month’s fasting, he creates an ability in himself to lead a life of piety as ordained in the Quran.

RAMADAN

A MONTH OF CONTEMPLATION



Ramadan is a month of contemplation, restraint and worship, of caring and thanksgiving, repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of Ramadan inspired the Prophet of Islam to exclaim: “Welcome to the one who purifies!” (*Kanzul Ummal*, Hadith No. 23692)

There is a very special connection between the Quran and Ramadan, for Ramadan is the month in which the Quran was revealed. The Quran makes special mention of this, while making the fast obligatory for its followers. In the words of the Quran:

“The month of Ramadan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore,

whoever of you is present in that month, let him fast; but he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on.”
 (*The Quran*, 2:185)

The Quran is specially recited during this month so that believers may reflect upon it, understand its deeper meaning and make it a guiding force in their lives. At night the Quran is also recited during the *tarawih* (extra prayers during Ramadan) prayer.

In the month of Ramadan, the fasting person abstains from food and drink from dawn till dusk. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way he learns the art of desire management and so builds up his self-control. By exercising restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

The main aim of fasting is to lessen a person's dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety. Fasting is thus a stimulus for spiritual and intellectual development. Once made aware of his own helplessness, he connects to God with sincere prayer.

The practice of fasting is also largely aimed at saving a person from distractions. It produces sincerity in him. It draws a person's attention away from the external world and into the internal world. Hence fasting prepares him for the study of the Quran. And when a person studies the Quran with a well-prepared mind, he can understand the teachings of the Quran in greater depth.

The equivalent of spirituality in the Quran is *rabbaniyah*, that is, a God oriented life. This expresses what the Quran means when it refers to spirituality. Spirituality (*rabbaniyah*), according to the Quran, is that mental state in which God-oriented thinking can develop in the individual.

Such God-oriented thinking reflects in his overall personality; his behaviour with others becomes God-oriented and his daily life becomes infused with divine hues. Thus Ramadan provides a framework within which devotees may improve themselves. Ramadan thus becomes a month of spiritual activism.

The fasting person repeatedly reads in the Quran that God is the Sustainer, that is, while man is the taker, God is the Giver. Everything that a person receives in this world, right from his existence and the oxygen he inhales to stay alive to the sunlight necessary for his survival, everything is God's gift. When a person starts to think in this way, he experiences a tremendous change within. He begins living in society as a giver-member. He becomes a creative member of society.

Ramadan is the month of contemplation. Saving oneself from all forms of distractions, fasting inclines one to become a student of the Quran. By seriously studying and contemplating on the Quran, one discovers those principles by which one may develop one's personality and become a positive thinker in the full sense. Then one is able to live a God-oriented life.

FASTING

A TRAINING IN THANKSGIVING AND TAQWA



The Quran states: “Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourself against evil. ... so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him.”
(*The Quran*, 2:183, 185)

From these verses of the Quran we understand that fasting is training of two things at the same time. One, thanksgiving, the other *taqwa* or righteousness. Food and drink are two great blessings of God. But in normal circumstances man does not realize it. During fasting when he abstains from these things the whole day and then after sunset when he eats and drinks after experiencing great hunger and thirst, only then he realizes how great these blessings of God really are. Overwhelmed with this experience, he expresses his gratitude to God from the innermost recesses of his heart. This inculcates the spirit of thanksgiving in a fasting person.

On the other hand, fasting is a training in *taqwa* or living a God-fearing life. *Taqwa* means that man should keep himself away from all those things that God has forbidden in this life and he should do only those things that God has allowed him to do. Being God-fearing means, one refrains from all the things forbidden by God in this worldly life. And he does only what God has permitted him to do. Abstaining from food and drink during the day and eating only during the night is a form of training to make God his guardian. By making man abandon certain things temporarily in the month of Ramadan, he is trained to leave off all those things which God disapproves of in the course of his life in this world.

The temporary deprivation of food and water stresses the importance of these things as divine blessings. It reminds a person that what all one has is from God, Who is the supreme and all-powerful Being, and one day all would be taken away from him. This makes one realize that one is here for a test. It breaks one's arrogance and stubbornness. Fasting makes one realize the reality of life, that is his helplessness on *ijz*. Man is cut to size. It creates a practical situation when one prays truly from the heart knowing how completely he is dependent on God. Such prayers connect him to the Almighty.

When he is consumed by hunger and thirst, man realizes how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of the succour of God. It is when man experiences this helplessness, *ijz* which is made manifest during the times when man feels hunger and thirst, that his true self meets God. Thus it is the discovery of the real benefactor that brings along with it immense pleasure and satisfaction. This experience makes him aware of his duties as God's humble servant. This feeling leads to caution in life. It makes one God-conscious and live a life of piety, *taqwa*.

Roza is, therefore, an opportunity or the meeting point between man and God. This meeting point is the last stage of helplessness, which makes you realize that God is all-powerful and man is helpless.

SPIRITUAL TRAINING DURING RAMADAN



Ramadan is a month of supplication, contemplation, sympathy and training in humility. How does fasting lead us towards these virtues?

Fasting, by its very nature, is an act of patience. Patience and forbearance are what lead a person to the state of the heart which enables him to experience the feeling of nearness to God. It is only then that words worthy of divine acceptance come to one's lips. Patience is the ground on which the blessed tree of supplication or *dua* is grown. It is not just a verbal act. In its essence, it is an act of the heart.

This shows the relation between fasting and supplication. Fasting increases the spiritual capability of a man's heart and when this capability increases, the words which ensue are genuine, heartfelt and more precious. Real fasting is that which induces real *dua*.

During Ramadan, a dramatic change comes over the believers. They are seen sitting inside mosques, reciting the Quran, immersed in prayer and in remembrance of God. They become more detached and contemplative. This detachment and staying away from distractions create a good environment for moral rectification. It paves the way for introspection and self-correction.

Humility refers to man acknowledging his helplessness vis-à-vis God's greatness. The feeling of helplessness is not simply a feeling but rather the greatest motivational force in the life of a person. It relates to God, but when this feeling is produced in man in the real sense, it finds expression in human relations. One who becomes truly modest before God finds this same spirit making him modest before human beings.

The height of spirituality is a person's realization of his own helplessness and the supreme power of God. The biggest obstacle to a person's spiritual growth is his own ego and false pride which lead to his being distanced from God. The sole concern of a spiritually pure person is earning God's pleasure.

According to a tradition, the Prophet Muhammad observed: "The month of fasting is the month of compassion." (*Shu'abul Iman* by Al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 3608) This explains that fasting teaches sympathy that is to teach man what the basic human requirements are. It makes him aware of hunger and thirst. This understanding makes him aware of the difficulties of his fellow beings and inculcates in him a sense of sympathy thereby making him share his bounties with those who are in need. This sharing will not just be in the form of giving away a portion of what he has but in being sensitive towards safeguarding himself from usurping others' rightful share directly or indirectly and in the conservation of natural resources.

Ramadan is thus a process of spiritual rejuvenation of a believer. He can look forward to applying the lessons learnt during Ramadan to everyday life. A person who fasts in the true spirit can count

on drawing upon the reservoir of fortitude that he has built up and on the power of supplication. He responds with patience and gratefulness, humility and sympathy towards his fellow beings when he is faced with challenging situations.

RAMADAN AND DESIRE-MANAGEMENT



In the Chapter *Al-Baqarah* (The Heifer) of the Quran, believers are enjoined to fast during the month of Ramadan:

“Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil.” (*The Quran*, 2:183)

What is meant by fasting? The term ‘Roza’ is of Persian origin. In Arabic, it is known as ‘Saum’ meaning abstinence. It is an exercise aimed at controlling our desires. In other words, it is the Art of Desire Management.

Every man is filled with desires. One way of leading the life could be by following our whims and doing whatever we feel is correct, be it taking revenge, conducting robbery, indulging in corrupt practices, getting angry, being selfish etc. because all of these are desires. The other way can be leading a life whereby these desires are wilfully managed.

God has given us free will and our test is to rightfully use this freedom and thereby control our desires. Thus, the individual who fasts, imposes self-discipline. The one who does not fast, lets his desires loose. In this context, fasting teaches desire-management.

Fasting is to abstain from eating and drinking for one whole month. The period of fasting begins from sunrise and ends at

sunset. Throughout this month, believers can eat and drink during the night, but not in the daytime.

According to Islamic teaching, fasting is not simply about experiencing hunger and thirst. In fact, hunger and thirst are symbolic of purifying the soul and training ourselves to control or manage our desires. The Prophet of Islam has said that one, who fails to abstain from using abusive language and persists in his evil habits, will not have his abstinence from eating and drinking accepted by God. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1689)

The fact is that everyone has enormous desires, everyone has an ego and there are many negative thoughts hidden in the human heart. To live the life of a true believer, one is required to control one's desires and to try to live a life of self-restraint.

According to Abu Huraira, the Prophet of Islam once observed: 'When any one of you is fasting, he should refrain from all indecencies. He should not raise his voice. If anyone fights with him or abuses him, he should not retaliate, but simply say that he is fasting.' (*Sabih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1894)

By giving up eating and drinking in the month of Ramadan, a person tries to train himself for a greater form of fasting, that is, refraining from all kinds of evil habits by managing our desires. Psychological studies show that if someone forms a habit over a period of a whole month, this habit becomes a part of his second nature. In one sense, fasting in the month of Ramadan is based on this human psychology, which is used to bring about moral training in self-discipline and desire-management.

Self-disciplined behaviour has the greatest value in the life of a man or a woman. It makes one a predictable person and a good member of society. Self-discipline makes one a man of principle, thus enabling one to perform one's duties. It develops a mature personality and makes it possible for one's potential to be utilized in significant ways.

Self-discipline, in helping one to evolve as a developed personality, is the key to all kinds of success. It saves man from provocation, anger and unnecessary involvement. It is a master formula by which he can manage all the affairs of his life. Without self-discipline, man is like an animal; whereas with self-discipline he becomes a human being in the complete sense of the word. Self-discipline, in setting bounds to man's freedom, helps him to manage his desires and checks him from going astray.

Self-discipline is an act of the present, but it brings one great benefit in the future. Self-discipline is the best formula for future building. It saves one from saying: "Alas, I missed the bus!"

FASTING: A TRAINING IN HUMILITY



The Quran tells us that fasting is prescribed for you so that you may fear God. (*The Quran*, 2:183) What does it mean to fear God, *taqwa*? *Taqwa* or fearing God means that man should acknowledge his helplessness vis-a-vis God's greatness.

When one fasts one realizes one's own helplessness vis-à-vis God's greatness. The truth is that the acknowledgement of one's helplessness is the beginning of *imaan*. When a person realizes God, at that point, he is overwhelmed by the feeling of his helplessness, termed as *ijz*. Belief in God is, in fact, to discover this boundless greatness of God. And one who discovers this boundless greatness will be overwhelmed with the feeling of helplessness.

Imaan is another name for the realization of God—the realization of the God who is the Creator and Sustainer of the infinite universe, who is controlling the infinite universe with astonishing power,

who is the one who gives us the blessings of food and drink. Those men and women who are aware of this, will feel that all greatness belongs to God and they will come to understand their trial of helplessness.

The feeling of helplessness (*ijz*) that one experiences when one fasts, is not simply a feeling but is rather the greatest motivational force in the life of a person. *Ijz* revolutionizes one's entire personality. It shakes one's whole being and brings about a complete revolution in one's mind.

The feeling of *ijz* one receives when fasting relates to God. But when this feeling of *ijz* is produced in man in the real sense, it finds expression in human relations. One who becomes truly modest before God, finds this same spirit making him modest before human beings. In relation to God, this feeling is called *ijz*, while in relation to man this feeling is called modesty.

Fasting, in essence, is a training in humility.

FASTING AND MORAL DISCIPLINE



According to Abu Huraira, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “When any one of you is fasting, he should refrain from all indecencies. He should not raise his voice. If anyone fights with him or abuses him, he should not retaliate, but simply say that he is fasting.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1894)

This tradition tells us that fasting does not entail merely abstaining from food and drink, but rather demands that man should renounce all evil. If he is to shun his evil ways, he should not shout at people or allow himself to be provoked by each and every

irritating circumstance. This shows that fasting is not just a ritual but aims rather at producing the true spirit within a man; which may change his thinking and his temperament; thus, bringing about a transformation in his character. In this way, fasting can change the entire personality of a person so that it becomes spiritual in nature.

True fasting makes a person sincere to the ultimate extent. Every aspect of his personality is coloured by his seriousness. He is not upset in the slightest by the gravest of provocations. No amount of provocation deflects him from the right path, and he becomes a peaceful member of society. He turns into a truly modest instead of an arrogant person and does not create problems for others.

The individual who fasts in the real spirit will not give up eating and drinking while at the same time failing to abstain from immoral behaviour. His fasting will have no meaning if, when he changes the timings of his regular intake of food and drink, he does nothing to change an immoderate way of life. True fasting necessarily inculcates moral discipline in a person.

FASTING AND CHARACTER-BUILDING



Fasting (*sawm*) is one of the five pillars of Islam. Right from dawn till dusk, a man who is strictly on a fast will neither eat as much as one morsel of food nor drink a single drop of water. By submitting to this discipline, that is, by depriving himself of the prime necessities of life, man learns the valuable lesson of fortitude. With no food and drink, he naturally feels hungry and thirsty, and his strength begins to ebb. The entire routine of his life is severely disturbed and his whole system is upset. But, out of a high sense

of discipline, he braves all the difficulties and discomfort, and remaining alert and never losing heart, he steadfastly discharges his duties.

Food and drink may be temptingly placed before him, but, despite an overwhelming urge to have both, he will not even touch them. In this way, he prepares himself for a well-regulated and responsible life, doing only what is his duty and refraining from pernicious acts and habits. Having strengthened his character he continues with his mission in life, no matter how much he may be beset by adversity.

God has endowed man with innumerable gifts, but all too often, he takes them for granted without any feelings of gratitude. Countless benefits like the air, the sun, the water, have been showered upon man, the absence of any one of which would cast his delicately balanced system into a living hell. But because he has received these things without any effort on his part, he sets no great value upon them, and hardly ever stops to ponder upon how they came to be his. It is only when fasting temporarily curbs the satisfaction of his desires that his consciousness of the value of these divine gifts is awakened. When, at sunset, after a whole day's hunger, thirst and the accompanying discomfort and fatigue, a man begins to eat and drink, he becomes fully aware of his utter dependence on God's bounty. He is then filled with the realization that he owes an endless gratitude towards the Bountiful Creator.

The life of a believer in this world is one of fortitude and forbearance, limited as it is to the enjoyment of whatever is allowed by God and avoidance of whatever is forbidden by Him. The journey on the path of righteousness and truth is beset by difficulties which a believer must staunchly face up to.

In the face of provocation, he cannot stoop to take revenge upon his adversaries who have made him the object of their spite and

malice. On the contrary, the slights and injuries of this world should leave him undaunted; he should simply be able to take such untoward incidents in his stride so that he may continue unflinchingly to discharge his duties. Whenever his pride has been hurt, or whenever some unpleasantness has left him in a state of agitation, he must guard against adopting a negative attitude—for this is sheer weakness—and must continue to devote his energies in a positive manner to worthy objectives. Nothing, in fact, should stop him, or even slow him down in his progress towards the Hereafter.

All of the above situations demand enormous fortitude, and, without it, no one can travel along the path of Islam. Thus, the annual month-long period of fasting aims to build up the strength of character. Such strength is essential, if devout Muslims are to tread the path of righteousness for the rest of the year, avoiding impatience, cruelty, evil acts, and making no attempt to meddle with divine commandments. While in its outward form, fasting means abstinence from food and drink for a given period, in essence, it is training for a whole life of self-denial, inculcating patience, fortitude and forbearance. In this way fasting develops character-building in a person.

FASTING AND SELF-DISCIPLINE



Fasting is an exercise in self-discipline. During the month of Ramadan, the believer abstains from food and drink in the daytime of his own free will. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way, he builds up his self-control. By practicing restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

Apart from man, there are innumerable other things in the universe, all of which—having no free will of their own—adhere strictly to God’s law. Man, however, is not in the same category as these things, for God has given him the freedom to choose the path that he wants to tread. Notwithstanding this divine gift of freedom of will, it is still the desire of the Almighty that man should, by his own choice, tread the path of obedience.

It is, therefore, to condition him to follow the path of restraint that the rule of fasting has been laid down. No mere annual ritual, fasting is a form of training undergone every ninth month of the Muslim year. It is not just a matter of temporarily enduring hunger and thirst; it is a lesson in the permanent practice of patience and tolerance throughout one’s entire life.

While on a fast, a man may have food and water before him but, despite his hunger and thirst, he will make no move to eat or drink. He exercises self-control. God desires that he should also exercise the same restraint whenever he gets the opportunity to display his ego and his arrogance. He must not fall into unjust ways just because the bait is tempting, and all doors have been opened for him. If man is to earn God’s favour, he must eschew the path forbidden by Him, and set his feet firmly on the path of modesty and humility.

The path followed perforce by the universe must be adopted by man of his own free will. That is why it is desirable that he should lead a life of self-imposed curbs. The unflinching self-restraint, which prevents him from eating or drinking while on a fast, is the virtue which will guarantee moral behaviour throughout his life.

In the Hadith, Ramadan is called “the month of patience.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20323). This month is meant to serve as a training course which will enable the individual to lead a

successful life in this world by keeping his negative feelings under control. Negative feelings, it must be remembered, present the greatest obstacle to human progress. Fasting is the pious way to solve the biggest of all human problems.

According to a tradition of the Prophet of Islam: “There is a Zakat for all things, and the Zakat of the body is fasting.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1745) Here, the expression Zakat is used in the sense of purification. There is, indeed, a way of purifying everything. Just as bathing purifies the body, so fasting purifies the soul.

According to a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad observed: “Whenever one of you is invited to a meal while he is on a fast, he should inform his host that he is fasting.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1150) The Prophet of Islam gave this very sound advice: “Whenever one of you is on a fast, he should be soft in his demeanour. In the event of being abused or provoked, he should simply say that he is on a fast.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1894)

Leading a life of restraint for a whole month produces a transformation in one's thinking. It enables one to offer a positive response to another's negative behaviour. Even strong abuse and other types of provocation will not goad the fasting believer into retaliating in the same coin. Rather than sink to that level, he will simply explain that he is on a fast. His own heart tells him that by observing a fast he has pledged himself to piety and in view of that, he cannot contemplate any evil action.

In this way, fasting inculcates in man the necessity to abstain at all costs from anti-social activities, and from all ungentlemanly words and deeds. He is thus brought to a life of moral restraint in this world. Fasting, in teaching a person self-discipline, lead to self-purification, that is purifying oneself of all negativities.

FASTING AND SELF-PURIFICATION



Fasting is a kind of reminder to a sincere person. It reminds us that we are in the world of God, a world which has been created by God. Its owner is God, not us. Here we cannot live according to our will. Here we cannot eat according to our will. Here we cannot drink according to our will. Here we cannot speak according to our will. Here we have to live in accordance with the will of the Creator.

This is so simple matter. This kind of life is possible only when man apprehends God at the level of realization; when he discovers the reality that in this world there is no place for those who lead a permissive life. The secret of success in this world of God lies in leading a disciplined (*paband*) life rather than a permissive (*beqait*) life.

The month of Ramadan is, in fact, the month of purification of the soul. This month demands that man reassesses his life; that he reviews all his affairs; that he replans his religious and *dawah* life; that he purifies his heart and mind; that he builds a new personality within himself. In this way, he should totally overhaul himself in every religious and spiritual respect.

This is the purification of the self and this is the real aim of Ramadan. One who spends the days and nights of Ramadan in this way is the one who has truly fasted. The true fast is that which is a source of purification of the self or the purification of one's inner personality. Purification of the self is a continuous process in the life of the believer. But in the month of Ramadan, it is possible to perform this process of purification of the self with greater intensity.

ZAKAT: THE PRESCRIBED CHARITY



Zakat or the alms-tax, is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. *Zakat* means purity. This means that a man purifies his earnings by giving away one part of them in the path of God. In this way, *zakat* awakens the sense in man not to consider his earnings as his own possession, but a gift of God. *Zakat* is, in essence, a practical acknowledgement of God's bounties. And this admission is no doubt the greatest form of worship.

Zakat payment is obligatory, at the minimum fixed rate of 2.5% per annum, on all wealth that is subject to growth. It takes the form of the giving of alms out of one's own private means. This amount is given in the name of God and is to be spent on worthy religious causes 'for the sake of God' and on meeting the needs of the poor and the helpless.

Zakat is an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God, and that nothing should, therefore, be withheld from Him. Man himself plays only a very small part in obtaining whatever he owns in this world. Were he not to have the benefit of God's endless bounty, he would neither be able to grow grain, raise cattle, set up industries nor accomplish any other work of a useful nature. The system of life created for him by God, fulfilling all of his requirements from those of his inner being to those of his external environment, is one of greatest perfection. Were God to withdraw even a single one of His blessings, all man's schemes would lie in ruins and all his efforts would be in vain. All productivity would grind to a halt, and life itself would come to a standstill. Therefore, one should give *Zakat* to others with the feeling that they are giving them their rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained.

Zakat gives a clear indication of what one's responsibilities to others should be. Everyone is required to recognize the rights of others,

just as everyone is expected to sympathize with those afflicted by adversity. This feeling should be so well developed that one should have no hesitancy about sharing one's possessions with others, or coming to their assistance, even when it is clear that nothing can be expected in return. Even where there are no ties of friendship, one should be a well-wisher of others and guard their honour as if it were one's own.

Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life should come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers. The observance of *Zakat* is a way of acknowledging this fact of life. Islam desires that private wealth should be considered as belonging to God, and therefore should be spent in the way as ordained by God.

In doing so, no one should consider that he is conferring a great favour upon those less well-endowed than himself and should in no way be condescending to the recipients of his charity. When a man gives alms to others, he should do so with the knowledge that they have a rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained. He is doing no more than giving others their due. But when he gives, he can feel reassured that he himself will be given succour by his Maker on the Day of Judgment. In giving to others, he knows for certain that he will not be denied by God at the Last Reckoning.

ZAKAT: AN ANNUAL REMINDER OF GOD'S GIFTS



Zakat brings the realization that all of one's possessions are gifts from God and makes one keenly aware of the virtues of devotion to God. In the light of such awareness, one cannot remain insensitive to the needs of the society in which one lives.

Zakat is a perennial reminder that a selfish stance is a wrong one, and that others must be given their rightful share of our earnings. *Zakat* is in the nature of an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God. They are all Gods gifts.

One unfortunate aspect of human relationships is that people tend to give to others only when they hope to gain something in return. Money, they feel, should be returned with interest. When such an understanding becomes a factor in our social organization, exploitation becomes rampant; everyone is ready to plunder everyone else. This results in society falling prey to oppression and disorder.

No one—no matter whether they are rich or poor—can be at peace in a society stricken with this malaise. Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life should come to the assistance of their less well-endowed brothers, in the knowledge that they will ultimately be rewarded by God.

Believers have the assurance of God that if they give to others, whatever they give will be returned to them many times over in the next world; their trust in God's promise is complete. In a society ordered in this way, feelings of antagonism and indifference are not allowed to develop; people are not bent on exploiting one another. There is never an atmosphere of mutual resentment and dissatisfaction, for everyone lives in peace with his neighbour. Such a society, in short, is a haven of contentment and well-being.

In its external form then, *Zakat* is an annual tax. But in its essence, it is the principle on which God and His creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

FASTING PREPARES BELIEVERS FOR THE DAWAH MISSION



According to the Quran, ‘the call to God.’ (41:33) is called *dawah ilallah*. Calling people to God means communicating the message of God—Quran and Islam—to all mankind.

The call to God aims at bringing people closer to their Creator and Sustainer, and therefore, inviting them to adopt the God-oriented life, and warning man of the consequences of the self-oriented life. Calling people to God is telling them that the only right way of life for them on this earth is to become true believers in God. Primarily, the purpose of *dawah ilallah* is to acquaint man with the creation plan of God.

As we learn from the Islamic history, calling people to God was the greatest goal of the Prophet of Islam. It was for this purpose that the Prophet Muhammad was sent as the messenger of God to the whole of humanity as mentioned in the Quran: “We have sent you forth as a mercy to all mankind.” (*The Quran*, 21:107).

However, Prophet Muhammad lived in this world for a limited period of time and now the question arises as to how, after the Prophet’s death, the prophetic responsibility had to be discharged. In his lifetime the Prophet performed this duty directly. After he had gone, this mission had to be carried forward indirectly by his followers, the Muslim *ummah*. It is, therefore, incumbent upon Muslims as the Prophet’s followers to carry out this mission from one generation to the next and, in presenting the preserved message of Islam to people of every age and time till the Last Day. Ibn Ishaq, the Prophet’s earliest biographer, said that when the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) came to the Companions and reminded them of their responsibility of *dawah ilallah*, he said: ‘God has sent me to the entire world as a blessing, so you should carry out this responsibility on my behalf. God will show His mercy to you.’ (*Sirat ibn Hisham*, Vol. 4, pp. 268-269)

It is, therefore, incumbent upon the followers of Prophet Muhammad to carry on the work of calling people to God, *dawah ilallah* after him. This prophetic responsibility devolves upon the Muslim Ummah. Fasting prepares a believer to dedicate oneself for such a higher mission.

The Quran is a book of mission. In the month of Ramadan, every believer goes through the Quran to discover the message of the Quran. This deep study of the Quran awakens in him the spirit of sharing this message with others. Understanding his responsibility of *dawah ilallah*, he adopts the communication of this message of calling people to God as his mission. Therefore, every year, one month is meant to prepare a believer to carry on this divine mission and he devotes eleven months to spread the message of the Quran (and Islam) to all mankind. One who observes fasting to prepare himself for the mission of the Quran and dedicates himself to this *dawah* mission, has been promised unlimited reward by God.

Spreading the message of the Quran is a divine mission. According to the Quran, it is akin to providing support to God as mentioned in this verse" "Believers, be God's helpers." (*The Quran*, 61:14)

That is why the Prophet of Islam informed that fasting is to prepare oneself for the sake of the divine mission. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1151) This is the greatest mission, so one who devotes himself will be held deserving for the greatest reward.

ZAKAT FOR DAWAH ILALLAH



Zakat, alms-tax is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. Its payment is obligatory, at the rate of 2.5%, on all wealth that is subject to growth. This amount is given in the name of God and is to be spent on worthy religious causes and on meeting the needs of the

poor and the helpless. Eight categories of people, eligible to receive *Zakat*, have been specified in the Quran:

“Alms are only for: the poor and the destitute, for those who collect *zakat*, for conciliating people’s hearts, for freeing slaves, for those in debt, for spending for God’s cause, and for travellers in need. It is a legal obligation enjoined by God. God is all-knowing and wise.” (*The Quran*, 9:60)

Of the eight categories for the distribution of *zakat* mentioned in the above Quranic verse, ‘for the cause of God’ is directly related to *dawah ilallah* or calling people to God.

Often ‘for the cause of God’ is related to *jihād*. *Dawah ilallah* or the call to God and the Quran has been termed as *great jihād*, *jihād-e-kabir* in the following verse of the Quran: “Do great jihād with the help of it (the Quran)” (*The Quran*, 25:52)

The Egyptian scholar, Rasheed Raza Misri, has noted in his commentary of the Quran entitled *Tafseer Al-Manar* that the words ‘for the cause of God’ are equally applicable to those who strive to spread the word of God. (*Al-Risala English*, June 1984, pp 6-7)

In *Tafseer Manar*, Rasheed Raza Misri explains that the best way to give alms (*zakat*) ‘for the cause of God’ in the present age, is to contribute to the training of dayees, and to their dispatch to other lands, and to continue to give financial support to them. The highest form of spending *zakat* ‘for the cause of God’ is, therefore, to strive to spread the word of God (Quran) to mankind and calling people to God (*dawah ilallah*).

In the following verse *dawah ilallah* has been called ‘helping God’ or *Nusrat-e-khuda*, “Believers, be God’s helpers. (*The Quran*, 61:14) It means to become wholly honest in relation to God and to feel and evince total goodwill towards one’s fellow men.

Spreading the word of God (Islam) worldwide is a responsibility that Prophet Muhammad gave to members of his Ummah. Muslims are duty-bound as followers of Prophet Muhammad to undertake *dawah ilallah*. Giving *Zakat* for propagation of the message of true religion is an effective way to perform one's duty of *dawah ilallah* assuring God's reward for those who spend their wealth for God's cause:

"Those who spend their wealth for God's cause may be compared to a grain of corn which sprouts into seven ears, with a hundred grains in each ear: for God grants manifold increase to whom He wills; God is infinite and all knowing."
(*The Quran*, 2:261)

Fasting prepares a believer for the mission of God. Giving zakat for the sake of God is a way to fulfil this high purpose, in the hope of becoming eligible for this highest reward.

ITIKAF: A SPIRITUAL RETREAT DURING RAMADAN



Fasting means withdrawing from worldly attachments. This reaches a climax during *Itikaf*. *Itikaf* is a very special practice, marking the closure of the blessed month of Ramadan. Observers of this practice are required to stay in a mosque for ten days or less, during the last ten days of Ramadan.

Itikaf means going into seclusion for the purpose of concentration. In the final days of fasting, when a Muslim is more spiritually prepared and more awakened, he goes into seclusion in the environment of a mosque, freeing his mind of the activities of this world. In spiritual terms, it is meditation; in intellectual terms, it is contemplation.

Itikaf is a total retreat conducted during the last ten days of Ramadhan. In Itikaf one is totally cut off from these pursuits. One retires from the human world and enters the world of God. The contact which the believer thus establishes with God should remain with him throughout his life. This is what the Prophet termed “zuhd” or detachment from the world and has been made obligatory in the form of fasting during the month of Ramadan.

Abu Hurairah reported: “The Prophet used to observe *itikaf* every year (during Ramadan) for ten days; in the year in which he passed away, he observed itikaf for twenty days.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2044)

This renunciation or Itikaf, during the last days of the month of fasting is considered an extremely desirable form of worship. In Itikaf, one distances completely from the world and turns to God. Itikaf is thus a full form of what is required during the whole of the month, but God has not enjoined to observe Itikaf for the whole month as a concession made to devotees.

The purpose of *itikaf* is to engage in *muhasaba*, which means introspection. During this practice, one finds time to reflect on one’s life, one’s past and present, and what course to follow in the future. The ten-day period of *itikaf* requires a person to undergo overhauling in the spiritual sense.

During Itikaf one undertake introspection and reads the Quran more deeply. This reading is not only meant as recitation of the words of the Quran but is aimed at delving into the deeper meaning of the Quran and understanding its message. This practice is like taking a spiritual bath by making oneself a more awakened person.

During *itikaf* a Muslim tries to look at himself in the divine mirror. He makes an effort to rediscover the Quran and to reapply the Quranic teachings in his life every year. This rediscovery of

the Quran is very important. Life is ever-changing and full of new situations. In this sense, it poses a continuous challenge to every person. When a person goes into *itikaf* and studies the Quran in seclusion, he discovers the Quran again with reference to the new situations he may be facing. This practice keeps the Muslim intellectually alive. In this way, *itikaf* enables a Muslim to evaluate his response towards each new situation and update his life accordingly.

In some way or the other, *itikaf*, in terms of contemplation in seclusion, is common to all religions. The form it takes may differ, but in spirit, it is universal. In the course of daily life in this world, the individual keeps getting distracted. Therefore, it is essential to refocus. The practice of *itikaf* aims at bringing one who has been derailed back to the right track. The distracted soul has to be turned into a focussed soul.

Ramadan is a month of profound spiritual experience. When one drinks water after a long period of thirst, eats food after a long period of hunger, and is at rest after a long period of unrest, he receives a special kind of spiritual uplift in his life. This is the daily experience of the month of Ramadan. *Itikaf* is meant to enhance and broaden these spiritual experiences. In this sense, *itikaf* means increasing these spiritual experiences on a larger scale. Both Ramadan and *itikaf* are similar, but with a difference. Where fasting during Ramadan is a routine experience, going into *itikaf* makes it an extraordinary experience, ensuring a heightened spiritual preparedness for the moral challenges of life.

If fasting is a spiritual experience, *itikaf* is spiritual retreat, designed to enable the rebuilding of self. Ramadan is meant to foster this spiritual transformation and *itikaf* enhances this process during the period of retreat.

LAILATAL-QADR: NIGHT OF DESTINY



One of the special features of Ramadan is the ‘Lailatal-Qadr’ or the Night of Destiny. It is the night on which the Quran was revealed on Prophet Muhammad as mentioned in Chapter 97 of the Quran in these words:

“We sent it [Quran] down on the Night of Destiny. And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; on that night, the angels and the Spirit come down by the permission of their Lord with His decrees for all matters; it is all peace till the break of dawn. (*The Quran*, 97:1-5)

Great importance is attached to Night of Destiny and the Quran calls it ‘better than a thousand months.’ Flocks of angels descend on the earth on this night, producing a heightened spiritual atmosphere. This enhances the spirituality of the people and adds more value to their worship. These angels carry the commands of God for the coming year. Believers then pray all night, and according to the Quran, praying on this night is better than praying for a thousand months. This night brings wisdom to the human soul.

This night falls on one of the last ten nights of Ramadan and brings the period of fasting to a close. ‘*Lailatal-Qadar*’ is also termed as the ‘Night of Decisions’ as God takes decisions for the coming year on this night.

Once Aisha (the wife of the Prophet), asked Prophet Muhammad as to how she should pray if she happened to find Lailatal-Qadr. The Prophet gave this prayer: “O God, You are the Forgiver, You love to forgive Your servants, so You forgive me.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 3850)

The greatest thing to ask God is forgiveness. It is forgiveness which leads one to eternal Paradise. Therefore Prophet Muhammad advised us to seek forgiveness from God Almighty on this night.

FASTING FOR THE GREATEST REWARD



In the Chapter Al-Baqarah of the Quran, there are five verses that deal with fasting in the month of Ramadan (*The Quran*, 2:183-187). In the book of Hadith, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, seventy-three sayings of the Prophet have been quoted with regard to fasting. Detailed provisions regarding Ramadan can be found in the books of fiqh.

In a Hadith, the Prophet of Islam has said: "Every deed in Islam is rewarded from ten to seven hundred times. But God says, 'Fasting is for me, and I will give unlimited reward to one who fasts.'" (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1151)

The question is: what is the importance of fasting such that one who fasts shall be given unlimited reward? The above Hadith gives the reason. It says that one who fasts gives up food and water for the sake of God. Here, 'for the sake of God' is not an ambiguous phrase. It means that a person who fasts, prepares himself for the mission of God. Due to this high purpose, he will be given the highest reward.

In the month of Ramadan, it is required that every believer must go through the Quran and find out the message of the Quran and adopt the spreading of this message as his mission. So, every year, one month is meant for preparation and eleven months for spreading the message of the Quran to all mankind.

Spreading the message of the Quran is a divine mission. According to the Quran, it is akin to providing support to God. Due to this speciality, the Prophet of Islam informed that fasting is preparing oneself for the sake of the divine mission. This is the greatest mission, so one who devotes himself for it is liable for the greatest reward.

The Quran says: “The month of Ramadan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is present in that month, let him fast.” (*The Quran*, 2:185)

In fact, the month of Ramadan is the month of *itikaf* (going into seclusion). Minimum *itikaf* is for ten days and maximum *itikaf* is for one month. Fasting means staying away from all kinds of distractions, including abstaining from food and water for a temporary period, thus freeing oneself from all other activities and totally engaging in the study of the Quran.

If you go through the Quran, you will find that the Quran is a book of mission. And, fasting in the month of Ramadan means saving yourself from all kinds of distractions, thus saving time for the study of the Quran. In this sense, the month of Ramadan is to discover the Quran and then to try to spread its message all over the world.

One who observes fasting in this sense and prepares himself for the mission of the Quran and dedicates himself for this dawah mission, is promised unlimited reward.

RAMADAN: A MONTH OF RIGOROUS TRAINING



Prophet Muhammad called the month of Ramadan a month of patience. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20323). The Quran states

that fasting during this month has been prescribed so that man may become God-fearing. (2:183) These two qualities of patience and piety or God-consciousness (fear of God) are required of us every month of the year. Why is it that they have been so particularly mentioned in connection with the month of Ramadan?

The reason for this is that Ramadan is the special period of the year during which these qualities of patience and God-consciousness (piety) are to be cultivated. Of course, the exercise of patience and piety is required of every believer every day of the year and every year of his life. These are principles to which he must at all times adhere.

In the month of Ramadan, however, special stress has been laid on this so that these two attributes become an integral part of one's character. This is done by laying down a certain discipline, so that much as people may want to do something, they will then refrain from doing it if it is an action displeasing to God. If they wish to eat or drink something, no matter how strong their desires, they will not do so if the Divine law prohibits it. They will follow the will of God irrespective of the circumstances and regardless of any difficulties they may encounter in the process. Even if it means leaving behind, or abstaining from, that which they hold most dear, they will not abandon the way of God.

Ramadan is a kind of "crash course" aimed at inculcating in people a truly religious spirit and making them conscious of their responsibilities to God. For one month in the year, people spend all of their time in worship. All of their days and nights are spent in prayer and fasting. In this way, people are trained to perform every action in the divinely appointed way. Their waking and sleeping, their eating and their abstinence, their actions and their inactions; all must be in accordance with the commands of God.

A true servant of God, trained in this manner, behaves in a disciplined manner, not just on special occasions, but every day of the year. For one month, certain habits are enforced as part of a

certain discipline, so that for the rest of the year, the person will have no difficulty in exercising the same control over all of their actions.

Thoroughly imbued with the qualities of patience and piety during the month of Ramadan, one is able to maintain the same high standard of conduct through the rest of the year.

The rationale behind fasting for a month is made clear by psychological studies. It tells us that for a habit to be inculcated, 30 days are required. It is not an overnight miracle but a lengthy process. The practice becomes a part of the personality only when it is observed every day for at least 30 days and it is only then that it may continue for at least a year. Fasting is a special training where one is being prepared to lead a principled life—not merely during the month of fasting, but, in fact, for the whole year round.

FASTING AND EID AL-FITR



Ramadan being a month to be trained in inculcating spirituality, every ritual connected to fasting has a spiritual aspect. Fasting is not just an annual custom. It is a living creative process. It is related to the entire life of a human being, the aim of which is to make man's life a fasting-oriented life.

Fasting puts a curb on desires. As food and drink are desires. So, the reality of fasting is to put a curb on desires. It can be referred to as 'renouncing one's desires.' Food and water are essential needs of man. Sleep and rest are also requisites of man. During the month of fasting there are restrictions to these essential needs by compulsion. This training inculcates in man the capability to restrain his desires willingly so that he consciously leads a disciplined life.

Symbolically speaking, the position of fasting in human life is akin to the brakes in an engine. Brakes keep the engine of a vehicle in control so that the journey can be completed successfully. If there are no brakes in the engine, the vehicle will not be able to function effectively. The same is the case of fasting in the life of a believer. Man should accord the place of brakes to fasting in his life so that he may travel successfully on the path of God. The fasting of that person is true for whom fasting is like applying brakes on the things forbidden by God.

Just like the symbolism of fasting in our worldly life, the breaking of the fast presents a semblance of the life Hereafter. The breaking of the fast brings an end for a few hours to the restrictions placed during the day, and the day of the festival of Eid al-Fitr, brings an end to the prohibitions and restrictions placed during the entire month.

Eid al-Fitr, the day of the festival, also gives us a faint taste and semblance of the life Hereafter. It reminds us of the joys and pleasures of the Hereafter promised to a believer who has successfully passed this worldly test.

A true believer, having undergone the period of fasting in a most sincere manner, gets the feeling of the Hereafter as soon as the month of Ramadan is over and the celebrations for Eid are underway. He feels as if he is being entertained as a guest by God Himself. From the depths of his being, his heart cries out: 'O God, as You have helped me carry out the injunctions of fasting and at the culmination of the month, have bestowed on me the joys of Eid, accept this life of mine as one spent in fasting and bestow on me the delights of Paradise. Include me amongst the list of persons who have been bestowed the life of Paradise by opening Thy gates of mercy!'

The message of Eid fosters the rekindling of our faith and the opening of new vistas and an entirely fresh and innovative approach to the struggles of life which would culminate by the grace of God with the rewards of everlasting Paradise.

THE NIGHT OF REWARD



A portion of an authentic Hadith reported by Abu Hurairah and recorded in Musnad Ahmed is as follows: “During the last night of Ramadan, the sins of all the believers who have been fasting are forgiven. It was asked, ‘O Prophet of God, is this night the one known as the ‘night of power?’’ The Prophet replied, ‘No, but as soon as the deed is done, the reward for the deed is immediately bestowed’.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 7917)

According to this Hadith, on the last night of Ramadan, those amongst the followers of the Prophet who have fasted in the true spirit will be rewarded for their deeds, and this will be noted in their records. This night of Ramadan is referred to in other Hadith literature as the ‘night of reward’. (*Shu’abul Iman* by Al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 3421)

God rewards His believers for every good deed. Due to the special significance of worship during Ramadan, this reward has been specifically mentioned by the Prophet.

In reality, those who have spent the month of Ramadan in its true spirit can never even contemplate that they can spend the last night of Ramadan in frivolous activity.

It has been generally noted that when the month of Ramadan is completed, the night before Eid is spent by most people in careless indulgence and entertainment. They throng shopping centres and marketplaces. The above Hadith is a warning against all such frivolities. This is the night of reward and should be used in prayer and supplication.

The ‘night of reward’ is best utilized in more prayer and supplication, in introspection of the whole month of Ramadan that has just passed and in making fresh resolutions for the new year to come.

To spend this night in frivolous shopping and entertainment is to ignore its importance and lose this great opportunity to earn rewards. In reality, those who have spent the month of Ramadan in its true spirit can never even contemplate that they can spend the last night of Ramadan in frivolous activity. To such people, this last night will be one of prayer and supplication and not of negligence or entertainment.

Another authentic Hadith regarding Ramadan has been reported by Anas ibn Malik. One part of this Hadith is: "When the day of Eid al-Fitr dawns on them, then God is pleased and proclaims to the angels, 'O my angels, what is the reward for the doer who has completed his deed?' The angels reply, 'Our Lord, such a person should be given the complete reward for the deed done'." (*Shu'abul Iman*, Hadith No. 3444)

After the end of Ramadan, the day of Eid al-Fitr appears with glad tidings, with tidings of everlasting happiness as reward. This reward is for those believers of God who have proved themselves deserving of it by reviving the true spirit of all kinds of good deeds during the month of Ramadan.

EID AL-FITR

A DAY OF THANKSGIVING AND SHARING



The word Eid in Arabic means 'returning at regular intervals' and refers to the two annual Islamic religious celebrations. The fact that they occur in a regular cycle is important, for it gives a repeated opportunity for renewal, to forgive enemies, and contact people one has not seen for a long time.

Although there are several special times in the Islamic calendar, there are really only two religious festivals. These are Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Eid al-Fitr concludes Sawm, the ritual fasting period of Ramadan, one of the five pillars of Islam. Eid al-Fitr which marks the end of Ramadan is a day of thanksgiving and jubilation, as it signifies the successful completion of the sacred month of Ramadan, the time of earnest labour spent in fasting, prayers and study of the Quran. It is the loftiest achievement of moral exercises, which is celebrated with the greatest of zeal on the day of Eid al-Fitr.

Eid al-Fitr is observed with the spirit of thanksgiving all over the Muslim world, by offering prayers to God, and rejoicing on the accomplishment of an act of dedication and submission to the Almighty. The Muslims pay obeisance to the Lord in congregation—displaying the real spirit of brotherhood, equality and fraternity through congregational prayers and feasts.

An atmosphere of festivity and celebration can be found in all Muslim localities all over the world. There is no dearth of delights and merriment that accompanies any human celebrations. The poor and rich alike are attired in their best clothes, houses are cleaned and decorated, and greeting cards and gifts are exchanged. Delicious meals are cooked, and friends and relatives are invited. It is also an occasion when friends from different communities share this joyous occasion. They have meals together and take part in one another's happiness.

Man is a social animal, and he needs to interact with fellow human beings. Festivities and celebrations exist in all societies of the world. Likewise, for the Muslim community, this is a great occasion to interact with one another. This festival brings people together fulfilling a basic need of human nature. Due to one's own priorities, often one does not have the time to socialize in this fast-

paced world. The celebration of Eid thus acts as an excuse to break and stay away from these routine engagements and merge with humanity, in order to sustain unity and cohesiveness.

Real happiness lies in sharing the bounties that God has given us with others. One of the main reasons for celebrating Eid is that happiness can be spread among all mankind. By sharing happiness with one another we can certainly make this world a better place to live in. This will definitely foster a feeling of brotherhood and promote love for all mankind irrespective of caste or creed. Thus, Eid symbolizes a new basis for human unity as well.

By sharing happiness with one another we can certainly make this world a better place to live. The occasion of this festival provides, above all, a valuable opportunity to extend the hand of friendship to people from other communities and remove misunderstandings often prevalent in society. Muslims should come out of their seclusion and forge friendship, in order that this misunderstanding—which clearly stems from a narrow perception—is effectively brought to an end.

Eid provides a God-given opportunity for interaction between different communities. By sharing our happiness with them we can go a long way in easing the tension existing between Muslims and non-Muslims. The establishment of cordial relations among different communities will definitely result in prosperity of the community and the nation at large.

ZAKAT AL-FITR



Eid al-Fitr is celebrated by sharing happiness with the rest of mankind. It should also not be forgotten that real happiness lies in sharing with others the bounties that God has given us. We

should not forget those who are afflicted with poverty, ignorance, disease and other misfortunes. That is why charity has been held obligatory before the Eid prayers. The needs of fellow human beings should never be ignored. For, the real essence of Eid lies in spreading happiness and love all around us, which can be fulfilled only when we help the poor and the needy. It is incumbent on us to give alms (*sadaqah fitr*) on this festival. Alms should be given well before the Eid day so that the poor may take part in the celebrations as well.

In this sense *Zakat al-Fitr* is specifically related to the month of fasting and is given before the special Eid prayer.

According to a Hadith reported by Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet made Zakat al-Fitr obligatory for the fasting person to keep him from idle talk and indecent conversation and to provide food for the needy. Discharging the duty before the prayer is an accepted Zakat while discharging it after the prayer is just *sadaqah* (voluntary charity). (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 1609)

Zakat al-Fitr perfects the fast of Ramadan and purifies the fast of any indecent act or speech. It is obligatory on all Muslims: young, old, male and female. Every Muslim who possesses over and above what is needed as basic food for the duration of one day and night must pay *Zakat al-Fitr* for himself and his dependants and distribute it amongst the poor and needy. The earlier it is given the easier it is for them to make arrangements, so that they may also take part in the celebrations of Eid without any difficulties.

EID AL-FITR

A DAY OF DIVINE REWARD



Eid al-Fitr is an important annual festival for people of the Islamic faith. The Muslims celebrate it on the first date of Shawwal, that is, the tenth month of the Hijra calendar. On this festival, the Muslims exchange gifts and meet their neighbours as a mark of solidarity and brotherhood.

It is reported that when the Prophet of Islam saw the new moon at the coming of the month of Shawwal, he said: “O God, make this moon a moon of peace for us.” This saying of the Prophet expresses the true spirit of Eid. Eid is meant to promote spiritual values among people and create a peaceful environment in society. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 1397)

The full name of Eid is Eid al-Fitr, that is, Eid of breaking the fast. In the spirit of Eid al-Fitr, God and His greatness are acknowledged, His blessings for humanity are prayed for and the promise is made to Him that members of society will live together in peace. There is no prescribed ritual for Eid al-Fitr except for the two units of *namaz* (prayer).

Generally, it is held that Eid al-Fitr is the Eid of sweets, although sweets are not a religious part of Eid al-Fitr, but certainly they represent the spirit of Eid, for sweet dishes are always considered to be the sign of love, compassion and well wishing. Gifts of sweets distributed on the day of Eid represent the true spirit of this Islamic festival.

The Prophet of Islam once said that an exchange of gifts promotes love in society. (*Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat* by Al-Tabarani, Hadith No. 7240) So, sweets are not simply sweets: they also have a spiritual

meaning. Sweets represent not only the spirit of Eid, but also the true spirit of Islam.

The prayer observed on the day of Eid is offered in congregation. All the Muslims, including women and children, gather together in this congregational prayer in order to promote harmony and brotherhood, not only among Muslims but also among all men and women.

Eid comes just after the final day of fasting. The month of fasting and the day of Eid al-Fitr both represent two very important features of the religion of Islam. The Prophet of Islam said that the month of fasting was a month of patience. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20323).

That is, it is a month of self-restraint, a month of self-discipline, a month of self-control, a month of promoting duty-consciousness.

Eid al-Fitr represents the reward of God, which will be granted by God to those who observe one month's fasting. In other words, fasting represents dutiful worldly life and Eid al-Fitr represents the reward that will be given in return by God to man.

According to a tradition, the day of Eid is the day of divine reward. When believers observe their duty in the month of Ramadan in the true spirit, God Almighty declares: "O angels, be witness that I have decided to bestow upon them paradise in the world hereafter." (*Shu'abul Iman*, Hadith No. 3444)

In short, the month of fasting represents the responsibilities of the believers in this world and Eid al-Fitr represents the reward given to them in the world hereafter.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



What is the purpose of fasting?

“Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourself against evil. ... so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him.”
(*The Quran*, 2:183, 185)

According to these verses the purpose of fasting is: to make one cautious in life (2:183) and to make one thankful to God (2:185). The temporary deprivation of food and water makes one realize these as divine blessings. Then one develops thanksgiving towards God Almighty for giving us these blessings. Discovering one's helplessness or *ijz*, one prays truly to God. Such prayers connect him to the Almighty. This experience makes him aware of his duties as God's humble servant. This feeling leads to caution in life. It makes one God-conscious and live a life of piety. This is a training in *taqwa* or in God-consciousness.

What is the spirit of Ramadan?

The spirit of Ramadan is the spirit of abstinence. In Arabic, fasting is known as ‘Saum’ meaning abstinence. Abstaining from food and drink during the month of Ramadan is aimed to awaken the ‘saum spirit’ of the believer. Food and drink are two of man's basic necessities. These are the last things one should be asked to abstain from.

Asking a person to abstain from basic necessities like food and drink is like giving a strong and powerful message that you have to abstain from all the things God has forbidden you, much as this may go against your wishes.

A fast which is devoid of the saum spirit will not be acceptable to God or be rewarded.

Can you give us an understanding of fasting in modern equivalent terms?

Yes. Fasting is for personality and intellectual development. It could be best described as learning the art of desire management.

In fact, not understanding Islamic teachings in an intellectual way and only using the traditional explanations have led to practicing the religion only in its outer form with the absence of spirit. This spiritless worship is the cause of the rise of a culture which is not the Islam as preached by the Prophet and as followed by him and his Companions.

How does fasting help us to connect with God and pray to Him?

Fasting helps to lessen a person's dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety. Fasting is thus a stimulus for spiritual and intellectual development. When one fasts one becomes aware of his one's own helplessness.

Roza is, therefore, an opportunity or the meeting point between man and God. This meeting point is the last stage of helplessness, which makes you realize that God is all-powerful and man is helpless. This helps him to connect with God with sincere prayer.

What is the special relation between the Quran and fasting during Ramadan?

The Quran states, "The month of Ramadan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs and criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong." (2:185) This shows the close link between the month of Ramadan and Quran.

The Quran is a reward to His servants from God and fasting is acknowledgement of the reward. Through fasting man makes himself worthy of being thankful to God.

The main purpose of fasting is to go through the Quran with complete focus and dedication. This is a very serious study. So, believers are required to stay away from all other activities and concentrate their minds totally on the study of the Quran so that they are able to discover the deep meaning in the Quran.

How can we discover the deeper meaning of the Quran?

According to a Hadith, "The wonders of Quran shall never cease."(*Sunan al-Darimi*, Hadith No. 3358) From this we understand that just as taking more and more water from an ocean does not dry it up; similarly, continually reflecting on the Quran only allows its deeper meaning to unfold.

Materialists think on the lines of "more and more money" but the mindset of a believer should be "more and more wisdom from the Quran." In other words, if you dedicate the month of Ramadan to the study of Quran, you shall discover newer meanings. Taking us away from the routine of life fasting prepares one for the study of the Quran. And when a person studies the Quran with a well-prepared mind, contemplating on the verses, he can understand the teachings of the Quran in greater depth and discover the deeper meaning of the Quran.

Can you give an example of discovering the deeper meaning of the Quran?

I think the following verse of the Quran opens a whole new meaning to the reader: "Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil." (*The Quran*, 2:183)

This verse highlights that fasting is a universal practice and was a common element across religions. And ever since man inhabited earth, prophets were sent to guide him, and they enjoined their community to observe fasts. When man observes a fast today, he gets connected to a long history.

When I understood this I was gripped by the realization of this thrilling idea that those who observe fasts in the month of Ramadan become a part of that divine chain which begins from the first pious person and ends with the last man of history! The realization that you have got connected with the list of those pious and God-fearing men who led a rightly guided life is an overwhelming experience.

Does developing *taqwa* during fasting help us to find deeper meaning in the Quran?

The Quran states: “Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil.” (*The Quran*, 2:183)

Ramadan is the month of heightened God-consciousness, of attaining piety (*taqwa*). As I deliberated upon the verses above, I realized that *taqwa* actually, refers to sensitivity.

Fasting by its very nature is an act of patience and restraint. It helps a person to attain a state of mind, which makes him a more sensitive person. And only a sensitive person can seriously deliberate over issues. In psychology, ‘high sensitivity,’ is explained as the ability to process information deeply, to concentrate deeply and be highly conscientious. High sensitivity inculcates curiosity, seriousness and all other high qualities in a person. Elaine N. Aron in her book on high sensitivity wrote, ‘a person of high sensitivity can grasp a point with greater intensity.’ (*The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World*, Citadel Press) This statement illustrates the purpose of fasting—to inculcate sensitivity so that one is able to understand the profound meaning of the Quran.

Is overeating during *sehri* desirable?

Those who indulge in overeating to curb the feeling of thirst and hunger during *sehri*, in effect do not observe the fast as they do not allow the purpose of Ramadan to be met. Let me clarify this with the following instance from the life of the Prophet.

When Prophet Muhammad was returning from Taif, he was overwhelmed with sorrow at the response he received from the leaders of Taif. The people of Taif ordered their children to throw stones at Prophet Muhammad to drive him out of the city, causing him to bleed profusely.

It was in this state of being wounded, hungry and thirsty, that God suggested turning the valley of Makkah into gold for him but Prophet Muhammad replied, "No, my Lord, but let me have enough to eat and be hungry on alternate days; then when I am hungry I shall make supplication to You and make mention of You, and when I have enough I shall praise and thank You." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 22190)

From this Hadith, it can be drawn that the feeling of hunger and thirst serve the purpose of inculcating sensitivity within a person by making him experience helplessness. This develops piety in a person.

Is it okay to fast during the day and eat and drink as per our desires at night?

Fasting does not simply amount to observing hunger for a temporary period of time. In fact, it symbolizes a lifelong culture of dedication. The Arabic equivalent of fasting is *sawm*, which means abstinence.

Abstinence is the gist of fasting. Abstinence from food and water for a limited period is symbolic training. Fasting reminds a faithful person that if the acts of abstinence were to reach the extent of refraining from food and water for a temporary period, then he would be ready to do so for a higher purpose.

Although this training is for a temporary period it enables a person to lead his whole life in accordance with this spirit. Fasting is not a set of rituals. It is the adoption of the well-known principle—simple living, high thinking.

Is throwing lavish *iftar* parties with sumptuous food part of Islam?

Iftar is an Arabic word, which literally means ‘to break’. In the Islamic context, it means to break the fast, to eat and drink in the evening after the daylong fast. *Iftar* is not simply a matter of having dinner. It has great significance. It is a combination of spiritual and physical food.

Iftar should be a simple meal and not a lavish affair. Simplicity saves us from distraction and makes us concentrate on the spiritual aspect of fasting. On the other hand, if the *iftar* takes the form of a lavish affair, all attention will be focused on the taste and the physical aspects of food, and the spiritual benefits will be lost.

These days, organizing *iftar* parties has become a tradition. But this party should not be like any other party. Such a party should give us an opportunity for spiritual and dawah exchange, turning our individual experiences into a social experience.

Does Islam permit lavish *iftars* and extravagant shopping for Eid?

We often see people eating lavishly in the evenings after a full day of fast and shopping for the festival towards the last part of the month. These practices have nothing to do with Islam.

I advise that we should not judge Islam in the light of the behaviour of the Muslims but judge the behaviour of the Muslims in the light of Islam. If you wish to know what Islam actually preaches, please refer to the original sources, the Quran and Prophet’s life. After reading them one can see that Islam teaches simplicity.

Simplicity in one’s food (and other things) habits will be an integral part of a believer’s life. One of the teachings of the Prophet is ‘simplicity is a part of faith’. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 4118) Extravagance of any kind will not be the way of a true follower of the Prophet.

Can a person fast throughout Ramadan but miss out on its spirit entirely?

Roza (fasting) has a spirit and a form. Both are equally necessary, but without the inner spirit there is no value of fasting.

A teaching of Prophet Muhammad clearly tells us that a person who keeps fasts without observing its spirit, his fasting will be considered insignificant in God's eyes, as it will be merely hunger and thirst. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1903)

The spirit of fasting is abstinence. Abstinence from food and water for a limited period is symbolic training in self-restraint. Fasting is not a set of rituals. It enables a person to lead a self-disciplined life.

Does fasting inculcate any spiritual qualities in us?

In the month of Ramadan, a believer abstains from food and drink from dawn till dusk. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. When a person goes through this process, he trains himself in the art of desire management and so builds up his self-control.

While fasting, restraint or abstinence does not remain restricted to a person's intake of food, rather by exercising restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

The practice of fasting is also largely aimed at saving a person from distractions. It produces sincerity in him. It draws a person's attention away from the external world and into the internal world. This helps him to rise from trivial issues and become more centred on higher and deeper issues of life.

How is Ramadan a month of spiritual activism?

Ramadan, the month of fasting is a special and blessed month for Muslims. It was in this month that revelations of the Quran began to be made to Prophet Muhammad, marking the commencement of prophethood.

Prophet Muhammad divided the month of Ramadan into three parts. He called the first ten days, "Blessings", the next ten days, "Forgiveness" and the last ten days, "Freedom from hell-fire". (*Shu'abul Iman*, Hadith No. 3336)

The main aim of fasting is to weaken a man's dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety. In this sense, Ramadan is a month of restraint and worship; of caring and thanksgiving; of repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of Ramadan inspired the Prophet to exclaim: "Welcome to the one who purifies!" (*Kanzul Ummal*, Hadith No. 23692)

Ramadan is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavour to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings.

How does Ramadan help in moral rectification?

During Ramadan a dramatic change comes over the Islamic community. Believers are seen sitting inside mosques, reciting the Quran, immersed in prayer (*dua*) and the remembrance of God. They become more detached and contemplative. Their boisterous and frivolous urges are curbed.

Man is a social being: he is either encouraged or depressed by his surroundings. This sea change in communal life during Ramadan therefore affects the individual believer. He is encouraged by the change in his brethren and inclines more and more towards God. Believers turn away from common vices and peace and tranquillity reign in all the neighbourhoods and marketplaces.

All these changes create a good environment for moral rectification. The bad become less so and the good become better.

Why Ramadan is called a month of patience?

In the hadith, Ramadan is called the month of patience. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20323). This month is meant to serve as a training course in patience.

Patience enables the individual to lead a successful life in this world by keeping his negative feelings under control.

Negative feelings, it must be remembered, present the greatest obstacle to human progress. Fasting is the pious way to solve the biggest of human problems.

How is Ramadan the month of supplication?

While giving commands regarding fasting, the Quran makes special mention of supplication, or *dua*. “When my servants ask you about Me, say that I am near. I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me: let them then respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.” (*The Quran*, 2:186)

Fasting by its very nature is an act of patience. Patience and forbearance are what lead man to the state of the heart which enables him to experience the feeling of nearness to God. It is only then that the words worthy of divine acceptance come to one’s lips.

Patience is the ground on which the blessed tree of *dua* is grown. *Dua* is not just a verbal act. In its essence, it is an act of the heart. This is the relation between fasting and *dua*.

Fasting increases the spiritual capability of a man’s heart and when this capability increases, the *dua* which ensues is genuine, heartfelt and more precious. Real fasting is that which induces real *dua*.

How is Ramadan a month of sympathy?

The Prophet said: The month of Ramadan is the month of sympathy. (*Shu’abul Iman*, Hadith No. 3336) Fasting teaches a man what basic human requirements are. It tells him what hunger is and what thirst is. Those who do not get a chance to feel hungry or thirsty, experience these feelings during this month when they fast. For a few hours, the rich also come to live in the same conditions in which a poor man lives.

Ramadan is, therefore, a process of rejuvenation of a believer. He can look forward to applying the lessons learnt during Ramadan to everyday life.

A person who has fasted in the true spirit can count on drawing upon the reservoir of fortitude that he has built up, on the power of *dua*, of patience and gratefulness when he is faced with any trying situation.

How does fasting train in humility?

The Quran (2:183) tells us that fasting is prescribed for you so that you may fear God. What does it mean to fear God?

Fearing God means that man should acknowledge his helplessness vis-a-vis God's greatness. The feeling of helplessness is not simply a feeling but is rather the greatest motivational force in the life of a person. The feeling of helplessness relates to God, but when this feeling is produced in man in the real sense, it finds expression in human relations. It trains one in humility.

One who becomes truly modest before God finds this same spirit making him modest before human beings. This will ensure positive relations in society.

The height of spirituality is a person's realization of his own helplessness and the supreme power of God. The biggest obstacle to a person's spiritual growth is his own ego and false pride which lead to his being distanced from God. The sole concern of a spiritually pure person is earning God's pleasure.

How does fasting help us to develop strength of character?

Fasting helps us to build strength of character within ourselves by learning self-discipline.

Through self-discipline one is able to develop such a character in oneself to live a life of self-denial, inculcating patience, fortitude and forbearance so that one is able to tread the path of righteousness for the rest of the year.

During Ramadan one goes through a spiritual training course, the outward form of which is abstinence from food and drink for a given period, and the inner form is the strengthening of one's character.

What is the rationale behind the period of 30 days of fasting, why not less or more?

During the month of Ramadan, a believer, of his own free will, abstains from food and drink in the daytime. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way he builds up his self-control. By practicing restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

The rationale behind fasting for a month is made clear by psychological studies. It tells us that thirty days are required for a habit to be inculcated. It is not an overnight miracle but a lengthy process. The practice becomes a part of one's personality only when it is observed every day for at least thirty days and only then it may continue for the rest of the year.

Ramadan is a training course aimed at inculcating in people a truly religious spirit and making them conscious of their responsibilities to God. For one month in the year, people spend all of their time in worship. All of their days and nights are spent in prayer and fasting. In this way, people are trained to perform every action in the divinely appointed way. Their waking and sleeping, their eating and their abstinence, their actions and their inactions; all must be in accordance with the commands of God.

Are there any rituals that we should observe at night?

There are no rituals as such. One has to spend the whole night in prayer and supplication. It could be done in the mosque or in the privacy of one's home. It should be observed in all seriousness and sincerity.

Anything serious is not connected to any kind of loud behaviour. Every aspect of such an activity will be sombre and solemn. Each one will be wishing for solitude, peace and quiet to supplicate to God. Seeking forgiveness from God cannot be a public or a loud affair. One can understand the kind of atmosphere one needs to be able to do such worship.

What is Itikaf and what are its benefits?

Itikaf means going into seclusion for the purpose of concentration. In the final days of fasting, when a Muslim is more spiritually prepared and more awakened, he goes into seclusion in the environment of a mosque, freeing his mind of the activities of this world. In spiritual terms, it is meditation; in intellectual terms, it is contemplation.

The purpose of *itikaf* is to engage in *muhasaba*, which means introspection. During this practice, one finds time to reflect on one's life, one's past and present, and what course to follow in the future. The ten-day period of *itikaf* requires a person to undergo overhauling in the spiritual sense.

If fasting is a spiritual experience, *itikaf* is spiritual retreat, designed to enable the rebuilding of self. Ramadan is meant to foster this spiritual transformation and *itikaf* enhances this process during the period of retreat.

What is Lailatal-Qadr?

One of the special features of Ramadan is the 'Lailatal-Qadr' in Arabic. Its English equivalent is the Night of Destiny. It is also referred to as the 'Night of Decisions' and God takes decisions for the coming year on this night. This night falls on one of the last ten nights of Ramadan. Great importance is attached to this night and the Quran calls it 'better than a thousand months.' (*The Quran*, 97:1-3)

Once Aisha (the wife of the Prophet), asked the Prophet as to how she should pray during Lailatal-Qadr. The Prophet gave this prayer: "O God, You are the forgiver, You love to forgive Your servants, so You forgive me." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 3850)

The greatest thing to ask God is forgiveness. It is forgiveness which leads one to eternal Paradise. Therefore one seek forgiveness from God Almighty on this night.

What is the qualification to receive the blessings of the night of Lailatal-Qadr?

To answer this question, it is important to understand the following incident from the Prophet's life. During the month of Ramadan, the Prophet of Islam was in seclusion (*itikaf*) practised in the final phase of Ramadan. Then he came out of the mosque but went back inside again. He later told his Companions that an angel had come to pass on the knowledge about the Night of Destiny. When the Prophet came out to inform the believers, he saw two of his people quarrelling with each other. Instantly, the knowledge of the Night was taken away from the Prophet's mind. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2023)

This incident has a great lesson for the believers. The quarrel was not an armed battle: the two believers were merely arguing, but even a verbal fight is enough to have the divine knowledge taken away. Those who adopt the path of violence can never become the recipients of divine blessings.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word. Else the blessings may be showered, but not on him! Positivity is the most important trait that makes a man worthy of receiving God's blessings. We should keep a positive mind at all instances and seek forgiveness from God.

Is there a relations between fasting and dawah ilallah?

The Quran is a book of mission. In the month of Ramadan, every believer goes through the Quran to find out the message of the Quran. This awakens in a believer the spirit of sharing this message with others. And understanding his responsibility of *dawah ilallah* as a member of Prophet Muhammad's ummah, he makes the spreading of this message of calling people to God as his mission.

Fasting prepares one for such a mission. Fasting does not simply amount to observing hunger for a temporary period. It symbolizes a lifelong culture, a culture of dedication. According to Islamic ideology, a believer is a man of mission. A man of mission has little time for anything other than his mission. He eschews all activities as are irrelevant to his mission. This is the spirit of the man of mission and fasting symbolizes this spirit.

So, every year, one month is meant to prepare a believer to carry on this divine mission and in eleven months he spreads the message of the Quran (and Islam) to all mankind. One who observes fasting in this sense and prepares himself for the mission of the Quran and dedicates himself for this dawah mission, is promised unlimited reward.

Spreading the message of the Quran is a divine mission. According to the Quran, it is akin to providing support to God as mentioned in this verse" "Believers, be God's helpers. (*The Quran*, 61:14)

Due to this speciality, the Prophet of Islam informed that fasting is preparing oneself for the sake of the divine mission. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1151) This is the greatest mission, so one who devotes himself for it is liable for the greatest reward.

Can zakat be given for dawah ilallah?

Zakat, alms-tax is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. Its payment is obligatory, at the rate of 2.5%, on all wealth that is subject to growth. Eight categories of people, eligible to receive *Zakat*, have

been specified in the Quran: “Alms are only for: the poor and the destitute, for those who collect *zakat*, for conciliating people’s hearts, for freeing slaves, for those in debt, for spending for God’s cause, and for travellers in need. It is a legal obligation enjoined by God. God is all-knowing and wise.” (*The Quran*, 9:60)

Of the eight categories for the distribution of *zakat* mentioned in the above Quranic verse, ‘for the cause of God’ is directly related to *dawah ilallah* or calling people to God.

The Egyptian scholar, Rasheed Raza Misri, has noted in his commentary of the Quran entitled *Tafseer Manar* that the words ‘for the cause of God’ are equally applicable to those who strive to spread the word of God. (*Al-Risala English*, June 1984, pp 6-7)

The highest form of spending *zakat* ‘for the cause of God’ is, therefore, to strive to spread the word of God (Quran) to mankind and calling people to God (*dawah ilallah*).

In the following verse *dawah ilallah* has been called ‘helping God’ or Nusrat-e-khuda: “Believers, be God’s helpers. (*The Quran*, 61:14) It means to become wholly honest in relation to God and to feel and evince total goodwill towards all one’s fellow men.

Why does spending for *dawah ilallah* assure high reward?

Spreading the word of God (Islam) worldwide is a responsibility that Prophet Muhammad gave to members of his Ummah. Muslims are duty-bound as followers of Prophet Muhammad to undertake *dawah illah*. Giving *Zakat* for propagation of the message of true religion is an effective way to perform one’s duty of *dawah ilallah* assuring God’s reward for those who spend their wealth for God’s cause:

“Those who spend their wealth for God’s cause may be compared to a grain of corn which sprouts into seven ears, with a hundred grains in each ear: for God grants manifold increase to whom He wills; God is infinite and all knowing.” (*The Quran*, 2:261)

Fasting prepares a believer for God's mission. Giving zakat and spending one's wealth for the sake of God is a way to fulfil this high purpose, making one eligible for a high reward.

Besides God's rewards in the Hereafter what are some benefits of fasting in this world?

The immediate benefit a fasting person receives is that he is enlisted by angels as a grateful servant of God.

According to a teaching of the Prophet God says: "O people, all of you are hungry except the one whom I feed." (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2577) This is indeed a reality because if the food we eat does not grow and be nourished by soil, we humans cannot gain it for consumption by any other means.

That is why if a person keeps fasts in the month of Ramadan and is thankful for God's blessings, he proves himself deserving of receiving the food grown in the soil for the rest of the year as well. Otherwise, he will be deemed a usurper.

How can the benefits I receive while fasting continue throughout the year?

To receive the benefits of fasting throughout the year one must fast in the month of Ramadan in terms of form but must adhere to its spirit through the whole of the year. The spirit of fasting is to be grateful to God (*The Quran*, 2:185).

The spirit of fasting is that a person must continuously acknowledge the food, drink and other life-sustaining commodities that he draws from nature created by God. He must discover this fact and sincerely acknowledge the Creator for His innumerable bounties not only for the year but also for the whole of his life. This is the way to keep alive the benefits and training gained during the month of Ramadan.

Does a believer who fasts in the best of form and spirit contribute positively to society?

Contributing positively to society is possible for a believer by universalization of the spirit of fasting. Every person in this world who eats, and drinks should acknowledge the act of eating and drinking as exceptional—as if God Almighty were directly sending down these blessings to him.

One must make the spirit of fasting a universal realization for oneself. That is, the profound feeling of God being the Giver and one's own self being the 'taker' should incite him to become a 'giver' member of society. That is, one should strive to give to others what one is receiving from the Creator.

Why does God give unlimited reward for fasting?

In a Hadith, the Prophet of Islam has said: “Every deed in Islam is rewarded from ten to seven hundred times. But God says, ‘Fasting is for me, and I will give unlimited reward to one who fasts.’” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1151)

According to this tradition explains that one who fasts gives up food and water for the sake of God. Here, ‘for the sake of God’ means that one who fasts, does so only for God and prepares himself for the mission of God. Due to this high purpose, he will be given the highest reward.

In the month of Ramadan, it is required that every believer must go through the Quran and find out the message of the Quran and adopt the spreading of this message as his mission. So, every year, one month is meant for preparation and eleven months for spreading the message of the Quran to all mankind.

What is the night of reward?

It is reported in a portion of an authentic Hadith reported by Abu Hurairah: “During the last night of Ramadan, the sins of all the believers who have been fasting are forgiven. It was asked,

‘O Prophet of God, is this night the one known as the ‘night of power?’ The Prophet replied, ‘No, but as soon as the deed is done, the reward for the deed is immediately bestowed.’” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 7917)

The night before Eid is called the night of reward. It has been generally noted that people carelessly leave this night unavailed. The ‘night of reward’ is best utilized in more prayer and supplication, in introspection of the whole month of Ramadan that has just passed and in making fresh resolutions for the new year to come.

According to this Hadith, on the last night of Ramadan, those amongst the followers of the Prophet who have fasted in the true spirit will be rewarded for their deeds, and this will be noted in their records. This night of Ramadan is referred to in other Hadith literature as the ‘night of reward’. (*Shu’abul Iman* by Al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 3421)

What is the essence of the festival of Eid after fasting for a month?

As fasting does not imply mere hunger and thirst, the day of Eid al-Fitr does not imply mere feasting and celebration. It should rather strengthen in us the right perspective of the ephemeral nature of this worldly life and the imminent delights of the life Hereafter that are sure to follow.

This should be truly manifested in the thankfulness we present to the Creator by offering prayers and also by giving more in charity to the needy. As the period of fasting is spent in self-preparation and spiritual development, the day of Eid should inculcate in the believer a new spirit and a renewed sense of zeal and determination towards the journey to the life Hereafter. The message of Eid fosters the rekindling of our faith and the opening of new vistas and an entirely fresh and innovative approach to the struggles of life which would culminate by the grace of God with the rewards of everlasting Paradise.

What is Zakat al-Fitr?

According to a Hadith reported by Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet made Zakat al-Fitr obligatory for the fasting person to keep him from idle talk and indecent conversation and to provide food for the needy. Discharging the duty before the prayer is an accepted Zakat while discharging it after the prayer is just *sadaqah* (voluntary charity). (Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith No. 1609)

Zakat al-Fitr is given before the special Eid prayer. *Zakat al-Fitr* perfects the fast of Ramadan and purifies the fast of any indecent act or speech. It is obligatory on all Muslims: young, old, male and female. Every Muslim who possesses over and above what is needed as basic food for the duration of one day and night must pay *Zakat al-Fitr* for himself and his dependants and distribute it amongst the poor and needy. The earlier it is given the easier it is for them to make arrangements, so that they may also take part in the celebrations of Eid without any difficulties.

Does Eid help in strengthening the social bonds among people?

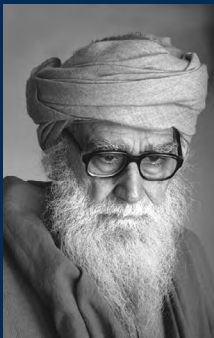
The occasion of this festival provides, above all, a valuable opportunity to extend the hand of friendship to people from other communities and remove misunderstandings often prevalent in society.

Muslims should forge friendship with their neighbours, friends and colleagues to foster harmony and the spirit of sharing.

Eid provides a God-given opportunity for social interaction and dawah between different communities. By sharing our happiness with them we can go a long way in easing the tension existing between Muslims and non-Muslims. The establishment of cordial relations among different communities will definitely result in prosperity of the community and the nation at large.

In the book, *Spirit of Ramadan*, the author Maulana Wahiduddin Khan explains that fasting in the month of Ramadan is a living creative process. Fasting aims to make man's life a *roza*-oriented life. The purpose of fasting is to make one cautious in life (2:183) and to make one thankful to God (2:185). The spirit of Ramadan is abstinence, to put a curb on one's desires. During the month of Ramadan one abstains from one's desires like thirst and hunger as per compulsion, to learn to put a curb on other desires as per our intention. A person trained in this way starts leading a disciplined life by one's own decision.

Symbolically speaking, the position of fasting is akin to applying brakes to the engine in one's life. Brakes keep the engine of a vehicle in control. Without brakes in the engine, the vehicle will not work properly. The same is the case of fasting in the life of a believer. The fasting of that person is real fasting for whom fasting becomes akin to applying brakes as far as forbidden things are concerned in the eyes of God. Man should accord the place of brakes to fasting in his life so that he may travel successfully on the path of God.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. Having founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International*, he was internationally recognized for his contributions to world peace. He authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, religion's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is popular because its language is simple, contemporary and easily understandable.

CPS International
centre for peace & spirituality

www.cpsglobal.org
info@cpsglobal.org

Goodword

www.goodwordbooks.com
info@goodwordbooks.com

