

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

By Allah's Grace, Incha Allah we are on the eve of welcoming a new month of Ramadan. This blessed month will start at the earliest tomorrow or at the latest on the day after tomorrow in Mauritius. In many countries around the world the date has already been fixed for tomorrow or for Sunday. Anyhow, when it exactly starts is not as important as how we are going to busy ourselves once it starts. Allah tells us in the Holy Quran:

“Yaa ayyohallazina aamanou koteba alaykomous siyaamo kamaa koteba alallazina min qablekoum la'al lakoum tataqoune.”

We usually translate this verse as ***“O ye who believe fasting (siyam) has been prescribed for you as it has been prescribed for those before you so that you may guard yourself against evil.”*** (2:184)

This is the first verse that was revealed concerning fasting. For about thirteen years that the Muslims lived in Mecca, there was no prescription for fasting. But once the community began to develop in Medina, the prescription of fasting was revealed about 18 months later and all Muslims tried their best to fast as they were taught by the Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw). Since then, every succeeding generation of Muslims has been fasting.

Siyam is a pillar of Islam. The other four pillars are, as you are aware, (1) the declaration of the Islamic credo i.e saying *“laa ilaha illallaho Mohammadur rasouloullah”* which is translated as “there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah” (2) Salat (3) Zakat (4) Hajj. He who declares himself a Muslim is expected to observe all these prescriptions of Allah concerning these pillars if he qualifies as someone on whom it is obligatory. If he abandons them or is negligent in their observance he is showing himself to be negligent in his duties towards Allah. Of these prescriptions, you will notice that one, which is Salat, is to be observed every day at the appropriate time and is prescribed for all Muslims as young as seven years to those who can observe it even if they are old, man or woman. Zakat is prescribed for that category of people who are wealthy. Hajj is prescribed for those who have the means to go to Mecca to perform it. As far as the Islamic credo is concerned declaring it once is quite sufficient but we keep repeating it in our Salat several times a day differently.

It is also good to note that the word *siyam* comes from the Arabic root *Swad Alif Meem* which means he kept back or refrained from doing something, or he refrained from eating, drinking, walking or talking etc. Hence the word *siyam* in Islamic terminology means to refrain from eating drinking or having sex between married couples from dawn to dusk. In addition to this we have also understood from the Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw) that whilst we are fasting we should do our best not to indulge in idle talk, backbiting, verbal abuse or expressing anger. To put it briefly, *Siyam* is there for us to observe restraint in three things that are permissible outside the prescribed hours of fasting, namely food, drink or sex between married couples, and to be more vigilant about all forbidden things like backbiting, expression of anger, futile discussions, giving free rein to roving eyes, futile pursuits etc.

In this verse Allah says that He has prescribed fasting for the Muslim Umma as He prescribed it for others who preceded us so that we might guard ourselves against all sorts of evils and we might become righteous people. If we investigate the major religions, we will notice that fasting plays a major part in their devotions.

Hence we should remember that we fast to protect ourselves against all sorts of evils and not because we want to be thinner or have a better athletic figure. The objective that we should never forget when we are fasting is that we should try our best to protect ourselves against all sorts of evils whatever form it may take. The daily life temptations will always be there but we should to our best to try and protect ourselves from them because of our fasts. Here, there is a challenge for the active Muslim to show or to prove whether he or she can truly walk that path which Allah has drawn out for him or her. Is he up to it or not. The one who would know about this is only Allah and the individual because he can feel whether he has done his duties as expected or has cheated and shown himself to be deficient. Fasting is one of the means that can additionally help us in treading the path to Allah. It imposes great restraint on all our senses and helps us to develop the discipline and self-control that is needed in order to reach our destination on this voyage or this path to the Lord of Power as the Muslim Saint ibn Arabi put it.

Every Muslim has the responsibility to transform himself through his lifetime for the better. As an *insan* who was created by His Lord to accept the *amanat* that

Allah has imposed upon him man cannot evade this responsibility. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا
وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ
كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا ﴿٧٣﴾

“Verily, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it. But man, bore it. Indeed, he is *capable of being unjust to and neglectful of himself.*” (33:73)

Those men or women who are ready to bear this trust (*amanat*), which is commonly understood to be the divine law, will forget themselves and do their best to bear this divine law. It means that in order to carry it through they will accept to undergo severe hardship and forget their selves and not consider divine law to be a burden. These are the men and women who show obedience to Allah. And since we are human, it is expected of all of us that we learn to tread the path of being obedient to the divine law. Fasting is one of the great means that can help us to achieve it.

With the arrival of the blessed month of Ramadan, each one amongst us is given the opportunity anew to reform ourselves and to manifest that we are truly good Muslims who care for their duties towards Allah without neglecting those who may need our care and attention. Now it is up to us to show that we are up this task. Ramadan is full of many blessings. We should do our best to make the most of it by fasting, by being regular in our prayers, by reading the Holy Quran whilst we are reflecting upon it. In addition, we should try to do as many nawafil prayers as possible because it is through these nawafil prayers that we may indeed reach Allah, so to say. Ramadan is the time for us to reflect much upon the purpose of our life and not on what we are going to eat for *iftar*. It is a time for us to engage in *Zikrullah* either in our prayers or in whatever free time we might spare and not in being engaged in anything that is fruitless.

Very often we have spoken about a hadith that spells out the importance and blessings of the month of Ramadan. We will remind ourselves with this hadith again. It helps us to have an idea of the magnificence of this month. It is as follows:

‘On the last day of Sha‘bān, the Messenger of Allah (upon him blessings and peace) addressed us and said: “O People, there comes upon you now a great month, a most blessed month, in which lies a night greater in worth than one thousand months. It is a month in which Allah has made compulsory that the fasting should be observed by day; and He has made the *qiyam al lail* (standing up for prayer at night) a *sunnah*. Whosoever tries drawing nearer to Allāh by performing any virtuous deed in this month, for him shall be such reward as if he had performed a *fard* (obligatory observance) in any other time of the year. And whoever performs a *fard* for him shall be the reward of seventy *fard* in any other time of the year. This is indeed the month of patience, and the reward for true patience is *Jannah* (Paradise); it is the month of sympathy with one’s fellowmen; it is the month wherein a true believer’s *rizq* (sustenance) is increased. Whosoever feeds a fasting person in order to break the fast (at sunset), for him there shall be forgiveness of his sins and emancipation from the fire of *Jahannam* (Hell), and for him shall be the same reward as for him (whom he fed), without that person’s reward being diminished in the least.”

Thereupon we said: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, not all of us possess the means whereby we can provide enough for a fasting person to break his fast’ The Messenger of Allah (upon him blessings and peace) replied: “Allah grants this same reward to him who gives a fasting person a single date or a drink of water or a sip of milk to break the fast. This is a month, the first part of which brings Allah’s mercy, the middle of which brings His forgiveness and the last part of which brings emancipation from the fire of *Jahannam* (Hell). Whosoever lessens the burden of his servants (bondsmen) in this month, Allāh will forgive him and free him from the fire of *Jahannam*.”

“And in this month, four things you should endeavor to perform in great number, two of which shall be to please your Lord, while the other two shall be those without which you cannot make do. Those which shall be to please your Lord, are that you should in great quantity recite the *kalimah tayyibah*: *Lā ilāha illa Allāh*, and make much *istighfār* (beg Allah’s forgiveness with *Astaghfirullāh*). And as

for those two without which you cannot make do, you should ask Allāh for entry into paradise and seek refuge with Him from the fire of *Jahannam*.”

“And whoever gave a person who fasted water to drink Allāh shall grant him a drink from my fountain, such a drink where after he shall never again feel thirsty until he enters *Jannah*.”

We will finish by reading an extract from the writings of the Promised Messiah regarding *Istighfar* so that we might each know how we should be practicing it. He says:

“Remember, the Muslims have been bestowed two things—one for obtaining strength and the other for the practical demonstration of the strength that has been obtained. *Istighfar* is for obtaining strength. It is also called seeking help. The *sufis* have said that as physical strength and power are fostered through exercise, in the same way *istighfar* is spiritual exercise. Through it, the soul obtains strength and the heart achieves steadfastness. He who desires strength should do *istighfar*. *Ghafara* literally means covering and suppressing. With *istighfar*, man tries to suppress and cover [those] emotions that keep him away from God. Thus, the only meaning of *istighfar* is that the poisonous elements that may well-nigh destroy a man may be overpowered, and one should give practical shape to the commandment of God by avoiding all obstructions. Remember that Almighty Allah has created two types of elements within human beings. One: the poisonous element, which is activated by Satan. Second: the remedial element. When someone is proud and considers himself to be worth something, and does not seek help from the remedial fountain, the poisonous element gains the upper hand. But when he considers himself unworthy and insignificant and feels within him the need for divine help, Allah creates a fountain for him that makes his soul flow. This is the meaning of *istighfar*, namely, to find this strength to overpower the poisonous element. (Malfuzat, new edition, vol. 1, pp. 348– 349)

May Allah help each one amongst us to have a blessed month of Ramadan.