

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

As from tomorrow, incha Allah we will be entering the second week of this blessed month of Ramadan. It is my hope and prayer that Allah helps our members and all Muslims in general to derive as much blessings as they could from this blessed month. *Alhamdulillah* that we live in a country where the longest day of fasting is only about 15 hours and the worst temperature that we might experience is around 33 degrees centigrade. Usually this occurs in December to mid-March. These days we are enjoying the shortest fasting days of the year - only about twelve and one third hours. In some European countries, the fast is around 18 hours and most Muslims continue to fast these long hours. In some countries like Pakistan, sometimes they fast in temperatures nearing 50 degrees and many workers work in the scorching heat. Allah has created us in such a way that we can easily adapt to our climate and carry on the obligations that we owe Him. So, whatever the circumstances we say *Alhamdulillah* and we carry on with our duties with the hope that Allah will accept them from us and treat us with His Immense Mercy.

In Ruku 23 of Sura Al Baqara which deals with fasting Allah says:

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ ۖ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ
 مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ
 أُخَرَ ۗ وَعَلَىٰ الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ
 طَعَامٍ مِّسْكِينٍ ۚ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ
 خَيْرٌ لَهُ ۗ وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ
 كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٥﴾

The translation is as follows:

The prescribed fasting is for a fixed number of days, but whoso among you is sick or is on a journey shall fast the same number of other days; and for those who are able to fast only with great difficulty is an expiation — the feeding

of a poor man. And whoso performs a good work with willing obedience, it is better for him. And fasting is good for you, if you only knew. (2:185)

Out of kindness and mercy Allah has prescribed fasting for us for a fixed number of days (either 29 or 30). Besides, if we happen to be sick, it is not incumbent upon us to fast. We will fast when we are in good health. Even if we are on a journey, Allah tells us that we might not fast until our journey ends. If for any reason somebody finds it very difficult to fast, there is an expiation: we should feed a poor man for the whole month of Ramadan. Within these three groups all those who might fall in the category of exceptional cases that cannot fast will find themselves. However, in order to motivate us to fast, Allah encourages everyone and says “*wa an tasoumou khayrul lakoum in kountoum ta’lamoune*”. It means that fasting is good for us if we could have the necessary knowledge to explore all its benefits. In other words, even if it causes us some inconveniences, its benefits to us are very good even if we do not know them. Allah has prescribed it and He is our Creator and He is well aware of what is good for us and what is not. There are many studies that have been done in many countries to prove the truthfulness of fasting being a good thing for the body. Recently there was a conference held in Germany where doctors spoke about the benefits of fasting and how they are treating patients with it. Allah who is all Wise cares for all His Servants and whatever He orders them to do can be but for their own benefits. We need to be grateful that Allah sends us such a month once every year. But we should learn to derive all the physical and especially spiritual benefits that such a practice can bring us. These days, when the taking of too much food is one of the causes of many diseases or even death, learning the benefits of fasting can be a big plus for all people. Even if we cannot devote time to learn about it, we will know more by experiencing it.

Now I will share some hadiths of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) and some extracts from the writings of the Promised Messiah about fasting.

The first hadith is:

“When the month of Ramadan arrives, the gates to Heaven are opened and the doors to Hell are closed, and the satanic forces are bound in shackles.”

This is one of the earliest hadiths that we have been hearing about Ramadan since we were children. It gives an idea of the Mercy and forgiveness of Allah - He opens the gates of heavens for His servants and closes the gates of Hell. We may understand it to mean that Allah opens opportunities for His Servants to do such good deeds that will take them directly to Paradise and far away from Hell. That Satan has been chained may be understood to mean that the inclination to do evil is under control. However, we should also understand that there should also be an effort on our part to try to enter Paradise and keep away from Hell and fight all satanic tendencies that may divert us away from our main objective, that is, to protect ourselves from all sorts of evil.

In another hadith the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) is reported to have said:

“Whomsoever faithfully fasts in the month of Ramadan with the ardent desire to gain the pleasure of Allah the Almighty, then his previous sins shall be forgiven and that person who faithfully remains awake during the night to witness *Lailatul Qadar* seeking the pleasure of Allah the Almighty, then his previous sins will be forgiven.” (Bokhari)

This is a hadith that motivates us to purify our intention and to seek the pleasure of Allah and to pray in the night of *laylatul qadr*. If our devotions are accepted, we will have all our sins forgiven.

The third hadith says: “Woe to that person, who witnessed Ramadan and before he could be delivered from his sins, the month passed by.” (Tirmidhi).

When we reflect on this hadith, we try to do our best so that we do not see the blessed days of Ramadan go by without striving to deliver our self from all our previous sins (try to do our best to deliver our self from all our previous sins so that the blessed days of Ramadan do not go by uselessly). We should try to spend as much time as possible in engaging in those activities that will draw us to Allah and away from anything besides Him as much as we can. We should pray on time and read the Holy Quran and engage in the remembrance of Allah, *Zikrullah* and as we said last week be engaged in asking forgiveness and the repetition of *Laa ilaha illallah*.

In another hadith, we know that the Holy Prophet (saw) said:

“Fasting is a shield. Thus, a person should refrain from vulgar and ignorant talk and if someone quarrels with him then he must answer him saying simply that, ‘I am fasting’. I swear to that Being whose hand my life is in, the stench of the mouth of one who is fasting is more preferred to God Almighty than the smell of musk. God Almighty says that he has abstained from his food, drink, desires and conjugal relations for My sake. Fasting is for My sake and I am its reward, and the reward for righteousness is tenfold.”

I will share with you an extract from Ibn Arabi about fasting which elucidates this hadith further. He says:

“May Allah support you! Know that fasting (*sawm*) is both abstention and elevation. One says "the day has reached its full height (*sama*)" when it has reached its highest point. (The poet) Imru'l-Qays said:

When the day reached its height (*sama*) and its heat was intense, i.e. the day reached its fullest extent (??). It is because the fast has a higher degree than all other acts of worship that it is called "fast" (*sawm*). Allah elevated it by denying that it is like any other act of worship as we will discuss (he discusses it in his booklet “the secrets of fasting) He denied its ownership to His servants although they worship Him by it and ascribed the fast to Himself. Part of its affirmation is that He rewards the one who is described by it by His hand even though He connected it to Himself when He stated that it is not like anything else.” In the Holy Quran Allah says of Himself “*Laysa kamislehi shay’oune*” that is “there is nothing like Him”. In the hadith, we read that the Holy Prophet is reported to have used the same words to describe the merit of fasting. It is to this that Ibn Arabi is referring here.

Now we will read some extracts from Hazrat Masih Maood (as). He says:

“Fasting is not merely staying hungry and thirsty; rather its reality and its impact can only be gained through experience. It is human nature that the less one eats, the more one’s spirit is purified and thus his capacity for [spiritual] visions increases. The will of God is to decrease one kind of sustenance and to increase the other. A person who is fasting should always be mindful that he is not just required to stay hungry. On the contrary, he should remain engaged in the remembrance of God so that he can cut

asunder ties of worldly desires and amusements and is wholly devoted to God. Hence, the significance of fasting is this alone that man gives up one kind of sustenance which only nourishes the body and attains the other kind of sustenance which is a source of comfort and gratification for the soul.” (Malfuzaat Vol 5)

“The Sufis have written that this month is great for the enlightenment of the heart. Blessed visions are frequently experienced in this month. Prayer purifies the self and fasting enlightens the heart. The purification of self means that one gets away from the lust of the *Nafs-e-Ammarah* (the self that incites).” It distances us from it. “The enlightenment of the heart means that [the] door of blessed visions opens up for us to see God.”

“It should be remembered that the fast does not mean merely that a person should abstain from food and drink over a certain period. During the fast one should be occupied greatly with the remembrance of God. The Holy Prophet(saw) occupied himself greatly with worship during the month of Ramadan. During that month one should discard one’s preoccupation with eating and drinking; and cutting asunder from these needs should address oneself wholly towards God. Unfortunate is the person who is bestowed material bread and pays no attention to spiritual bread. Material bread strengthens the body, and spiritual bread sustains the soul and sharpens the spiritual faculties. Seek the Grace of God, as all doors are opened by His Grace.” (Speech JS 2006)

I have given you all some food for thought for the month of Ramadan. May Allah facilitate fasting for everyone and may He accept the sacrifices that all His servants are making and may He reward us all. Ameen .