The Excellence of the Holy Month of Ramadhan

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Shaikh Saduq relates from an authentic source that Imam Raza (A.S.) related from his ancestors, who related it from Ameerul Momineen Ali bin Abi Talib (A.S.) that latter said that one day, the Prophet of Allah delivered the following sermon to them: 'O' People! the Month of Allah (Ramazan has approached you with His mercies and blessings. This is the month that is the best of all the month in the estimation of Allah. Its days are best among the days; its nights are best among the nights. Its hours are best among the hours.

This is a month in which you have been invited by Him. You have been, in this month, selected as the recipients of the honours from Allah, the Merciful. In this holy month, when you breathe, it has the thawab (heavenly reward) of Tasbeeh) (The praise of Allah on rosary beads), and your sleep has the thawab of worship.

Your good deeds are accepted, in this month. So are your invocations. Therefore, you must invoke your Lord in right earnest, with hearts that are free from sins and evils, that Allah may bless you observe fast, in this month, and to recite the Holy Quran. Verily I the person, who may not receive the mercy and benevolence of Allah in this month must be very very unfortunate having the end as bad (in the Hereafter), While fasting, remember the hunger and thirst of tomorrow in Qiyamat. Give alms to the poor and the needy, Pay respects to your elders. Have pity on your youngers and be kind towards your relatives and kinsmen. Guard your tongues against unworthy words, and your eyes from such scenes that are not worth seeing (forbidden) and your ears from such sounds that should no heard by you.

Be kind to orphans so that when your children become orphans they also be treated with kindness. Do invoke that Allah may forgive your sins. Do raise your hands at the time of Namaz (Prayers) as it is the best time for asking His mercy. When we invoke at such times, we are answered by Him, when we call Him, He responds, and when we' ask for anything it is accepted by Him.

O' People! you have made your conscience the slave of your desires, make it free, by invoking Him for forgiveness Your back is breaking under the heavy load of your sins, so prostrate before Him for long intervals and make it lighter.

Do understand it fully well that Allah has promised in the name of His Majesty and Honour that He will not take to task such people who offer Namaz in this month, and perform 'sajda' (prostration) and will guard their bodies against the Fire of Hell, on the Day of Judgment. O'

People! if anybody amongst you arranges for the' Iftar' (food for ending of fast at sunset) of any believer, then, Allah will give him the reward as if he has set free a slave. He will forgive his minor sins.

Then the companions of the Prophet (S.A.) submitted:

" But everybody amongst us did not have the means to do so." The Prophet told them: "Keep yourself away from the fire of Hell, by inviting for if tar, though it may consist of only half a date or simply with water if you have nothing else. O' People! anybody who may cultivate good manners, in this month will walk over the 'Sirat' (Bridge) in 'Qiyamat', though his feet may be shaking.

Anybody who make take light work from his servants. (Male or female), in this month Allah will make easy his accounting on the Day of Judgment. Anybody who does not tease others, in this month, Allah will keep him safe from His wrath in Qiyamat. Anybody, who respects and treats an orphan with kindness in this month, Allah shall look at him with dignity in Oiyamat. Anybody who treats well his kinsmen, in this month, Allah will bestow His mercy on him in Qiyamat while anybody who maltreats his kinsmen, in this month. Allah will keep him away from His Mercy, in Qiyamat.

Whoever offers Sunnat (Recommended) prayers in this month Allah will give him a certificate of freedom from Hell. Whosoever, offers one 'Wajib' Namaz in this month, for him the Angels will write the rewards of 70 such prayers, that were offered by him in any other month.

Whosoever recites repeatedly 'Salaat-o-salaam' on me, Allah will keep the scales of his deeds heavy, when in Qiyamat the scales of others will be tending towards lightness, Whosoever recites, in this month, only one 'ayat' (verse of the Holy Quran) he will be rewarded in a manner as if he had recited the full Quran, in other months.

O' People! the Gates of Paradise remain opened in this month. Do invoke that the gates may not be closed on you; while the Gates of the Hell are closed, do invoke Allah that these gates may never be opened.

The Commander of the Faithful [ALI (A.S.)] said that he got up and said, "O' the Prophet of Allah (S.A.) What is the best deed in this month?" He (S.A.) replied," O' Abul Hasan! abstaining from the matters forbidden by Allah, the Majestic, the Glorified, is the best deed in this month. "Then he (the Prophet) (S.A.) wept. Ali (A.S.) asked, "O' the Messenger of Allah! What makes you weep?" He (S.A.) replied, "O' Ali (A.S.) I weep for what they will do with you in this month. As if I am with you, and you are offering prayers to your Lord, when the worst of the foregone, and those who are yet to come, a brother of the person who slew the camel of Samood has

come and gives you a (sword) blow on your head, which reddens your beard." The Commander of the Faithful said.

Ali (A.S.) asked "O' the Prophet of Allah, will that be for the safety of my Faith" He (S.A.) replied, "Yes, it will be with the safety of your Faith O' Ali (A.S.) whoever kills you has killed me; whoever bears enmity to you is my enemy; whoever abuses you has abused me; because, indeed you are to me like my own self; your soul is from my soul; your nature is from my nature; Indeed Allah the Holiest and the Greatest, created me and you too; He chose me and you too; He selected me for Prophethood and selected you for Imamat; whoever denies your Imamat, has denied my Prophethood. O' Ali (A.S.) you are my successor, father of my children, my son-in-law, and my Khalifa over my (Ummat) people, both during my life and after my death. Your order is my order, your 'No is my No.' I swear by Him who made me the Prophet and made me the best of the people, indeed you are the Proof of Allah for His creatures, His Trustee of His .Secrets, and the guardian of His slaves

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FASTING IN THE MONTH OF RAMAZAN

Why Muslims follow a purely lunar calendar for fasting? Normally the fast should not affect the daily avocations, and it should not be a pretext for neglecting normal duties. Islam never approves, much less demands, of keeping vigil during the whole night and passing the following day in sleep and indolence. Fast means a greater effort to perform all the usual duties and something else, more prayers and more charity, and all this in the absence of food .and drink

THE REASON WHY MUSLIMS FOLLOW A PURELY LUNAR CALENDAR IN THE MATTER OF FASTING

Jews, Christians and Hindus have a solar year, either directly or a lunar year with intercalation, so that the time of fasting always falls in the same season. Muslims follow a purely lunar calendar, and consequently their month of fasting. Ramazan. Rotates gradually in all the .seasons of the year

SENSE OF FASTING(Spiritual aspects:)

Experience shows that a blind man has generally a stronger memory, and certain of his senses are more developed them those of an ordinary man who has sight. In other words, if certain

faculties are not utilized. They may strengthen some other faculties. Similar is the relation between the body and the soul. In weakening the body there is strengthening of the soul (spirit), even as the pruning of the branches of a tree procures more flowers and more fruit. When an individual fasts, his conscience pricks him in the face of evil deeds, and he is more able to resist temptations. Further, the fast makes him think of God more, develops his inclination for charity, makes him taste the sweetness of obedience to the Lord.

MATERIAL ASPECTS

Students learn for several months continuously, then they get a summer vacation. Employees work for six days of the week, the seventh day being a holiday for leisure and rest. Men expend mental and physical energy the whole day, whereafter the repose of sleep renovates their faculties for the next day. Even machines and tools require relaxation, and we observe this for motor cars, aeroplanes, locomotives, etc, is it, therefore, not reasonable to think that the stomach and the digestive organs also require rest? In fact modern medicine has also reached the same conclusion, and a large number of doctors in Switzerland, Germany, etc., prescribe, for various chronic diseases, forced hunger and thirst for longer or shorter periods according to the exigencies of the sickness and the physical capacities of the sick person.

They have also found that various glands secrete certain acids in the stomach on account of hunger and thirst and that these acids kill many a germ which produce different diseases. Statistics have also shown that several digestive and other diseases are less abundant among people who have the habit of fasting every year. We know that man requires a change of climate, air and water from time to time, Patients recovering from illness are sent away for convalescence to a place other than their habitual living place. The more fortunate among the Westerners pass a month of summer vacation outside their home. In other words, it is necessary to change the normal habits from time to time. This is also a kind of rest. We see, for instance that cultivators use their fields alternately and give 'rest' to the soil. Continuity being harmful, Islam has forbidden fasting during the whole year, even for those who want spiritual benefits thereby. Experience has also shown that if one fasts forever, it becomes a habit, and a second nature, and does not profit by it as does he who fasts with intervals. In fact, if one fasts more than 40 days consecutively, it becomes a habit; and if one fasts for less than a month it has not much effect.

To terminate this discussion, those who fast on medical prescription or even under compulsion as a discipline, do get the material benefits inherent in fasting; but there being no intention of a spiritual search, they do not benefit thereby spiritually. Muslims fast with the intention of

complying with the command of Allah. They therefore have its reward for their piety, while not losing the physical and materials benefits of the fasting.

In short, from whichever point of view one may study the Muslim way of fasting, it compares favourably with its counterparts in other civilizations. In fact, if it is day in Switzerland it will be night in America, and vice-versa. Every 1,000 miles East or West makes the difference of about one hour.

The Prophet is reported to have said at breaking the fast: "0' Allah for You have I fasted, in you have I believed, and with You nourishment do I break the fast. Accept it from me O' Lord!"

THE FAST

Those people who have not a deep insight into human nature and do not look at both the spiritual and material aspect often have the morbid mental state to object to the injunctions of Religion. Among them are those who pass taunting remarks against fasting. They say what sort of worship is this to starve from morning till evening. If we think over the philosophy of worship and understand in the light of the Quranic verse that our existence is meant for worship and existence is based on eating and drinking, therefore it also has a bearing on worship. Then we shall realize that just as sometimes talking is worship and some time keeping silence, in the same way some times eating will be worship and some times abstaining from it. Both these aspects are some times prescribed by the physical physician and some times by the spiritual one, Accordingly Allah sent this message to us through the spiritual Physician [Prophet Mohammad (S.A).

Fasting has been ordained to you as it was ordained to those before you so that you guard yourself (against evil). In this holy verse:

(i) 'has been ordained' shows 'Fasting is incumbent'.

(ii) 'As it was ordained on those before you' indicates 'Fasting dates back to the beginning of mankind'.

(iii) 'So that you may guard yourself against evil' means fasting will make you pious. Now if we consider over the different phases of piety, the advantages of fasting will be clear. Man has three instincts:

(i) Quwwate Shahwania (Faculty of Lust) By this instinct a man nourishes his body and produces children. If it exceeds its limit concerning diet, it makes him greedy and gluttonous. It may make the blood impure or a man may fall a permanent prey to dyspepsia and so on. The excess of this very instinct in sexual sphere causes many internal and external diseases which

can not be enumerated here.

(ii) Quwwate Ghazabania (Faculty of a version and acquirement): By this a man seeks his advantages and wards off his disadvantages. If this instinct is not kept within proper bounds, a man either becomes a coward or quarrelsome. All these aspects are against 'piety' and to end the obligation of fast with piety shows that the observer of fast becomes pious, the natural conclusion of which is that his instincts are moderate. Neither he is gluttonous nor quarrelsome. Accordingly the Holy Prophet (S.A.) and the Infallible Imams (A.S.) have .mentioned these attributes of fasting

The Holy Prophet (Mohammad) (S.A.)

The Commander of the Faithful [ALI (A.S.)] says that a party of the Jews came to the Prophet (S.A.) The most learned among them put a few questions, one of which was: 'What is the good to your people in that Allah has enjoined fast on them and that, too only for thirty days (excluding nights) whereas the other people had to fast for more than thirty days?'

The Prophet (S.A.) replied: "When Adam ate of that tree the fruit remained ill his stomach for thirty days. So Allah enjoined upon his progeny to remain hungry and thirsty for that period, and the permission to eat in the night is Allah's grace. Adam also had to fast for so many days and Allah enjoined those fasts upon my people."

Then the Prophet (S.A.) recited this verse: Fasting has been ordained to you as it was ordained to those before you so that you may guard yourself against evil (and that too) for counted days'.

The Jew savant said, Mohammad, You are right. Now tell me what is the reward for a person who observes those fasts." The Prophet replied: " Allah will characterize the believer who keeps the fasts in Ramazan to please Allah, with seven traits:

(i) If he has partaken of the forbidden food, it will be excreted after being digested.

(ii) He will not be deprived of the mercy of Allah.

(iii) He will share the compensation of his father's (Adam) fault,

(iv) Allah will grant him relief in his agony of death.

(v) The observer of fast will not feel hungry and thirsty On the Day of Judgment.

(vi) Allah will grant him deliverance from Hell fire on the day of Resurrection.

.(vii) He will satisfy him with the sacred diet of Paradise

The Jew said:

"Mohammad, you are right." Commander of the Faithful (ALI) (A.S.) There is a sermon in Nahjul Balagha, in which the Commander of the Faithful has stated a few symbols of the obligations of the Religion of the Prophet (S.A.) Among them is this reason of the obligation of fasting:

"Fasting was enjoined so that the sincerity of the righteous may come to light."

It is known that the righteous believes:

(i) Allah is our Creator and Lord.

(ii) He is Just and Wise.

(iii) He governs both our body and soul.

(iv) Any worship prescribed by Him for the two (body and soul) will be justified.

It is evident that if there were no physical worship the four aforesaid articles of Faith would remain concealed and the righteous and the evil doer would not be differentiated. Allah has provided an opportunity for the manifestation of these beliefs by enjoining the bodily worship. Therefore those who observe fast and offer prayers thereby demonstrate their beliefs which are inner states and invisible. Fasting thoroughly tries the righteous and shows that the observer of fast is humble. It reminds him of the hunger and thirst of the destitute and he deals with them according to the Religion of Mohammad (S.A.)

If his soul is more purified, his vision reaches upto Day of Resurrection and is imbued with the idea of hunger and thirst on that day Fasting, therefore, is all the more sweet to him because the 'Sharey' (exponent of the religion) has said that to be hungry and thirsty here, by the Order of Allah will save a person from the hunger and thirst on the Day of Judgment.

IMAM JA'FAR SADIQ (A.S.) THE TRUTHFUL

When asked by Hisham, son of Hakam, about the philosophy of fasting he replied that Allah enjoined Fasting so that the rich and the poor may be equal. The rich never experience hunger that they may show mercy to the poor. The rich provide everything for themselves because of their wealth. Allah desired that His servants may be equal on this occasion and the rich may also feel hunger and suffer pain. He, therefore, enjoined fasting that the rich may be kind to the destitute and merciful to the hungry.

IMAM RAZA {A.S.)

Mohammad, son of Senan, narrates that Imam Raza {A.S.) gave this reason for fasting that the observer of fast may feel the pain {pangs) of hunger and thirst, and prove himself meek,

humble, worthy of reward, hopeful and patient before Allah, and this trouble here may remind him of the hardships of the Hereafter. By getting rid of the evil desires a man's self learns a lesson in this world and expects the blessing of the Hereafter. The observer of fast sees through the circumstances of the needy and the destitute in this world as well as in the Hereafter. (The people who starve during (fast) will be rich in the Hereafter and those who do not observe fast and enjoy riches in the world, will face poverty in the Hereafter. The observer of fast finds out this subtle point.

These sayings of the Ma'soomeen (the Infallible) elucidate that the evil desires are crushed in fasting. The temper becomes moderate. It makes the rich attend to the poor for whom the Fasting Month (Ramazan) and the other months make no difference in starvation. The rich become humane and extend their helping hands towards the needy and the destitute.

In view of these sayings how ridiculous is the conduct of an observer of fast to pick up a quarrel with anyone during fasting. In the heart of his hearts he is angry with Allah that He ordered him to be hungry and thirsty, But being helpless before Him he is ready to avenge on His slaves. Fasting, however, cures the stomach. All the ancient and modern physicians hold that most diseases are caused by the upset stomach which is cured by starvation. The religion of Allah has fixed one month in a year for fasting if a man fasts regularly, his stomach becomes healthy for the whole year. If so much starvation does not suffice for some stomachs, mustahabbi (desirable) fasts have been suggested at different times in the whole year.

The very fact that fasting is incumbent during Ramazan indicates that the conduct of men during this month should be different from that in the rest of the year. During the eleven months a man is free to eat and drink whenever he likes, whereas in the month of Ramzan he is forbidden to do so in the day time. People tell lies, back-bite, gamble and do similar things. Religion forbids those things but they do not nullify any worship. But if these sins are committed, during the day of Ramazan, to the extent prohibited in fasting, the fast will be null. Similarly people quarrel all the year round, but it is strictly forbidden in fasting and sometimes this conduct nullifies the fast.

In view of these things it is evident that the observer of fast is to be pious and is to abstain from these things strictly while fasting because they are against piety, and if piety is nullified the fast will be null and void. In the light of the Quranic verse and the aforesaid savings of the Masoomeen (A.S.) (the Infallibles)"a Muslim as the opportunity to mend his character, purify his soul, eradicate the defects of his temperament and attain the temperance which is desired by Islam and which is responsible for both the spiritual and physical health of mankind. The moderation of the Quwwa-e Shahwania and Quwwa-e Ghazabania effect the spiritual power:

Reason controls these powers and makes them to do those things which please Allah and which the Quranic Verse 'so that you may guard yourself against evil, implies.

A lot can be written on this topic but a thinking person can clearly grasp the ways and means mentioned in this article. As thinking is a human characteristic and it is treated as worship, so the other aspects of this topic are left to the readers so that they may reap the benefit of the worship of thinking as well.

FASTING FOR FITNESS

Well-being: Aside from the spiritual value of fasting, there are Physical rewards that come to you by your not eating for a short time. These rewards are reaped not only by the over plump person, but by anyone who fasts. The general well-being of a person on a fast has been noted by physicians. Many a doctor advises fasting for a patient tussling with gout, heart disease, skin disorder, general intemperance to food and drink, or excessive smoking.

Brain Benefit: Fasting is good for mental discipline, and it effects spiritual uplift. The brain benefits greatly. If you are doing heavy study, preparing for a speech, or otherwise engaging in deep concentration, you do well to fast, Fasting sharpens your mind and makes you alert and sensitive to mental effort. You concentrate more readily if your stomach is empty and not drawing blood from the brain to digest food.

Many a public speaker knows well that eating before speaking reduces mental acuity and cuts down on the force of speech. They fast before an important speech and eat later. They know the brain benefits by a fast. Digestive Distress Relieved: Other organs that are relieved by a fast are the digestive organs. The stomach, liver pancreas, and intestines often are overworked. When the digestion is given a vacation, eating becomes a greater joy.

Rejuvenator and Skin Freshener: Fasting has been called a great restorer of youth and prolonger of like. This idea stems from the fact that people who fast acquire a clearer skin, a rosier tint to their cheeks, and a more youthful complexion than they had before. People troubled with skin disorders such as psoriasis, acne, or recurrent skin infection are often advised by their physicians to eliminate sweets and fats from their diet. How much better to eliminate all foods for a time periodically, and let the skin pores have a chance to cleans themselves and be free from the effects of too many sweets and fats.

Boon to Smokers: For anyone trying to stop smoking or drinking, a fast can be a boon to the body. By stopping tobacco, alcohol, and food intake for a time, a person helps the body return to normal. Once the body is "Scrubbed clean" inside, the smoker and drinker feels so alive and alert that he does not have any desire to return to his unwise habits.

A more nearly normal appetite follows a fast, and simple foods are enjoyed with greater relish. Heavy use of candiments-pepper, spices mustard, and catsup, is no longer needed to make. Food appetizing. Rests Hearts: If you are a heart patient you will find that a fast takes a load off your heart and your circulation. If you have been short of breath, a fast improves your breathing and, by elimination of salt and water from the body, reduces tissue edema. This condition may make it Possible for you to sleep easier and with fewer pillows.

Side Effects: Some minor discomforts are noted at time during fasting. The person who fast may be subject to headaches; if so, he needs the fast. Other side effects of fasting, such as a feeling of weakness, palpitation of the heart, and drowsiness late in the afternoon, usually minor, disappear with a little rest.

If the person who wants to improve his diet by cutting out meat, highly seasoned gravy, rich cake, and sugary preserves goes on a fast, he hurries the process of changing. After eating heavily of these foods for some time he cannot immediately enjoy a plain, wholesome diet. His taste is so perverted that he cannot enjoy good fruit, whole-grain bread, and vegetables. Such a fast proves of more benefit than medicine, for the abused stomach finds the rest it has long needed. Genuine hunger can be satisfied with a plain, nutritious diet. For spiritual uplift, try a fast. You will find that it draws you closer to Allah in prayer. It makes you character stronger by the self discipline and humble experience of denying yourself food. The double benefit is your feeling of well-being, with a clearer eye. sharper brain, springier step. and greater efficiency for your work. It has often been said.

"The man eager for success has the lean, hungry look". A bit of starvation can give you that eagerness in a hurry.

.Try a fast for spiritual and physical fitness