

# Ramadan: Month of Allah's Revelation

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Ramadan is a special month, which is noted in the Holy Qur'an. Allah revealed the Holy Qur'an in this remarkable month in order to guide His servants and lead them to prosperity. Surah Qadr (Chapter 97) is recommended to be recited during the holy month of Ramadan because the Qur'an tells us that the 'Night of Power' (Laylatul-Qadr) occurs each year during this month (Qur'an, 97:2-5; 2:85). This is a night when all the doors of heaven are open and the blessings of Allah are available for all people. The actual night is not known, but according to tradition (Hadith) the file of each Muslim is shown to the Imam of the Age (Twelfth Imam). Muslims should try to spend this night in the worship of Allah to demonstrate the depth of their faith in Him. The date is not definite, so people are encouraged to spend more time in prayer during the last nights of Ramadan.

It is believed that whatever a person asks of Allah during these nights is granted by Him. It is recommended to gather in a group on these nights, to strengthen the value of the worship and to create a sense of unity of purpose among the Muslims. The duty is more incumbent on men, but is good for women as well.

It is the duty of every healthy Muslim to fast during Ramadan and is an order in the Qur'an. This is to help the believers purify themselves. Allah's revelation comprises a variety of aspects and everyone according to the level of his piety and belief, makes optimal use of it to become a true believer.

In Ramadan, Allah's revelation completely changes people and guides believers from darkness towards the light. This change sometimes remains till the end of their lives. People who fast during Ramadan try to avoid doing things forbidden by Allah.

It is our duty to follow the Sunnah (Tradition) of the Prophet (SAW) by helping the poor, respecting parents and elders, being kind to children and orphans, controlling our tongues from saying bad things, averting our eyes from forbidden things and not listening to forbidden things. The Holy Prophet (SAW) said: "Don't do those things that are forbidden by Allah". In the holy month of Ramadan, when Allah answers our prayers, when even sleeping is considered as worship, and what is done by worshippers is accepted by Allah, it is best to abstain from .wrong-doings

## **Two Dimensions of Fasting**

'Saum' is not just fasting as understood and explained by the authors of English books on Islam. There is no single word in English language which connotes the meaning of Saum. Fasting is a term which doesn't convey but covers the meaning and significance of the Arabic term 'Saum'. In meaning 'Fasting' covers not even one full aspect of the word 'Saum'. Because the term 'Fasting' signifies only abstinence from food and drink for a required period of time. Fasting also means 'earning meager'. This shows that the word 'Fasting' isn't only inadequate to cover the meaning of 'Saum' but also misleading. It alludes the most significant and important dimension of 'Saum' but namely 'to observe'. In the absence of this dimension, the former cannot cover the meaning of 'Saum'. These dimensions are complimentary to each other. Therefore, 'Saum' becomes meaningful only when two dimensions, namely 'to abstain from' and 'to observe' are taken into account and .regulated through one's own personal conduct and social behavior

### **Vast Difference:**

Those writers who have explained 'Saum' as fasting, should know that there is a vast difference between 'fasting' and 'abstaining from'. Generally 'fasting' means abstaining from food and drink for a specific purpose. The purpose is to keep the ceremony pure in achieving something desirably by religious rites to avert the undesirable or to ward off evil but not to make fasting a principle of behavior in pursuance of life. Had the significance of saum been for abstinence from food, Allah would not have made it compulsory for the poor, who is virtually starving for food or 'fasting'; due to lack of food. But Allah didn't exempt 'the poor' from saum on the basis of poverty or starvation. This makes clear that fasting, which signifies 'starving', is not a religious requirement. That means, Allah's concern is with the attitude behind every performed behavior of the followers of Islam.

In other words, the significance of saum isn't to afflict 'the rich' with pangs of hunger, who usually live on highly delicious and palatable food. Then, in what sense saum differs in, meaning and becomes religiously significant than starving? It is contained in the expression 'abstain from'. Then what does saum mean by 'abstain from'? It means not only abstinence from food and drink for a specific period of time, but also from other things which are religiously prohibited.

'Saum' begins with lawful food. The follower of Islam should take this lawful food when it is permitted and forbidden food when it is prohibited, that is, roughly from Adhan in the morning to the Adhan in the Maghrib (sunset) in the holy month of Ramadan.

In other words, the follower of Islam must resist his temptations from taking food and drink, and direct his attention to Allah in all the activities of his life. By doing this the individual keeps his psycho-physical (mind-body) complex in his command. That is, keeping one's own body and mind under his control becomes a religious requirement. This control indirectly refers to balance in body-mind relations in respect of the fulfillment of responsibility which man owes to Allah.

### **Observance:**

The other dimension of Saum which is totally ignored in English works on Islam is to 'observe'. Then the question is, "what one should observe". It is to observe that which is prescribed by Allah and practiced by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) for himself as well as for others. Thus, it becomes evident from that, that Saum isn't a role to be played by the follower of Islam, but a practice to be carried out for the 'Purification of Life'.

In essence, all these form a part of preparation for Akhirat (hereafter). It is to help the followers of Islam in Akhirat the saum has been prescribed and made obligatory by Allah to all Muslims. Those who are sick or in traveling aren't exempted from saum, but the rule is relaxed for them till such time as they recover their health or come back from traveling. It is vigorous training given by Allah to all the followers of Islam for one month every year, which enables them to live the remaining 11 months of the year with the same spirit and reverence by taking their food at their usual time. It is a religious requirement to revive our spirit and renew our attitudes and deeds.

### **Apprenticeship:**

In Islam, the purification of human life isn't by rituals or by atonement of sin but by confession and promise to Allah, which don't require the supervision of any witness but are left only to the honesty of an individual. This is because, peace is rooted in one's own conscience and not in compromise. The confession is for having done wrong and the promise is to prohibit its repetition.

In modern times, the significance of fasting can be explained as an apprenticeship that a new-comer is required to undergo and a refreshing experience for the old practitioner of the faith of Islam. It revives the spirit of religion in the believer which dispels the fear of death, develops courage of truth and cultivates the spirit of sacrifice.

In the day-to-day life, the practitioner of the faith of Islam is required to abstain himself from

prohibitions and observe the prescriptions of religion by taking his usual food at the usual time, whereas, during the holy month of Ramadan, the follower of Islam is required to control himself by temporary starvation and observe strictly religious prohibitions and follow prescriptions which would keep the responsibility of choice and action alive in molding one's own life. It is through this sense of responsibility that the follower of Islam strengthens his faith in Allah. Probably it is for this reason that fasting is made obligatory to all Muslims irrespective of the poverty or the prosperity of the individual. In short, 'Saum' means abstinence from prohibitions by resisting food temporarily and regulating 'will' into action during the holy month of Ramadan to purify one's own body-mind relationship with Allah, which in turn would keep the individual free from prejudices and promote accommodative feeling in him when he deals with his fellowmen.

May Almighty Allah help us to make use of the blessings of this month, do what is permitted .(halal) and to distance ourselves from forbidden (haram) things - Ameen