

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS AND BE THANKFUL TO GOD

Reflections and Information on Ramadan and Fasting

The religious practices instituted by God, such as fasting in the lunar month of Ramadan, are not ordeals but rather great opportunities for us to develop our souls. They are blessings from God. If we can practice our religious duties the way we are supposed to, we get many benefits. Furthermore, these practices allow us to be more conscious of God in our lives.

Many people concentrate on the things they lack and get upset for what they do not have compared to others. If we want to be happier, we should count our blessings and think about all the things God has already given us. We should remember and reflect on the following verses of the Quran:

[16:18] If you count GOD's blessings, you cannot possibly encompass them. GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful.

[14:34] And He gives you all kinds of things that you implore Him for. If you count GOD's blessings, you can never encompass them. Indeed, the

human being is transgressing, unappreciative.

We should try our best to count our blessings, even though we cannot encompass them all. We have so much to be thankful for if we just think about them and remind ourselves! How about reflecting on our bodies and the infinite variety of things God created for us? We should remember God's blessings in the good times as well as when we go through the times of tests. We should not be unappreciative and heedless.

A wise person once said "We don't need more to be thankful for; we just need to be more thankful." How true! Furthermore, if we appreciate God's blessings and thank God for them, He rewards us with more. This is God's promise in 14:7 that "The more you thank Me, the more I give you..."

For Our Own Good

Some people entertain the idea that God should not need any of our prayers and appreciation of His blessings. The way they think is as if God

has ego and needs to satisfy Himself. Nothing can be further than the truth! They are the ones who have big egos. God makes it clear that He does not need any of our worship or any of us, but He is pleased for us if we make the right choice and decide to be appreciative (39:7). Therefore, if we are appreciative, it is for our own good (31:12).

Ramadan is Special

Ramadan (also spelled as ramadhan, ramazan, so on) is a very special month for Muslims. It is the lunar month during which the Quran was revealed, providing guidance for the people, clear teachings, and the statute book...(2:185) We also understand that God revealed the Quran into Prophet Muhammad's heart on the 27th night of Ramadan, in the Night of Power or Destiny (17:1, 44:3, 97:1-5). It was then gradually released into his memory in accordance with God's will and written down by him with the help of Gabriel over a period of 23 years.

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No Hardship in Religion

Not only has God given us this great blessing of fasting in Ramadan, He is also compassionate in accommodating every kind of situation. For example, *“if one is ill or traveling, an equal number of other days may be substituted. Those who can fast, but with great difficulty, may substitute feeding one poor person for each day of breaking the fast...”* (2:184). Of course, if one volunteers to do more righteous works, it is better. GOD wishes for us convenience, not hardship, that we may fulfill our obligations, and to glorify GOD for guiding us, and to express our appreciation (2:185).

God knows us better than we know ourselves. He is the One who created us. Even though He gives us alternatives to perform our responsibility when we are unable to fast, He emphasizes that if we can fast, it is best for us (2:184). We know that *“God never burdens any soul beyond its means....”* (2:286) and that *“The remembrance of God is the most important objective....”* (29:45).

Physical Benefits of Fasting

Besides nourishing our soul, the real self, fasting also has numerous, scientifically proven benefits for our physical health and the mental well-being of our body. The time, length and nature of the fast all contribute to its overall positive effect. Fasting gives our digestive system a rest and improves our physical health. In his book *“Fasting and Eating for Health,”* Joel Fuhrman, M.D. notes that *“The fast does not merely detoxify; it also breaks down superfluous tissue—fat, abnormal cells, atheromatous plaque, and tumors—and releases diseased tissues and their cellular products into the circulation for elimination. Toxic or unwanted materials circulate in our bloodstream and lymphatic tissues, and are deposited in and released*

from our fat stores and other tissues. An important element of fasting detoxification is mobilizing the toxins from their storage areas.”

Lunar Islamic Calendar and Ramadan

A lunar calendar is a calendar that is based on phases of the moon. The only widely used purely lunar calendar is the Islamic calendar or *Hijri* calendar, whose year always consists of 12 lunar months (9:36). A lunar month is approximately 29.5 days, which is the time it takes for the moon to orbit the earth. Because a lunar month is, on the average, one day shorter than a solar month, a lunar year is 10-12 days shorter than a solar year. Therefore, the Month of Ramadan comes 10-12 days earlier each year. This way we get to fast when the days are very warm and long in summer as well as when they are cool and short in winter. This beautiful design by God is also a test for us to see if we will fast regardless of the length or temperature of the days of Ramadan.

When is Ramadan?

The Muslims during the time of Prophet Muhammad did not have the technological advantage we have today. They needed to see the crescent moon before they started fasting. God tells us that He rendered the sun and the moon as calculation devices (6:96, 10:5, 17:12, 55:5). We have the technology to determine precisely when the different phases of the moon will appear for any given month, now or in the future, according to the design of God. So we don't need physical sighting of the moon to decide when the month of Ramadan will start or end. We can easily verify it for ourselves using the resources available for us. God has given us the hearing, the eyesight, and the brain, and we are responsible for using them (17:36).

What is an Islamic Day?

The Islamic day is the same as the Hebrew day. It begins at sunset and ends at

the next sunset. In this system, the night comes before the day. Therefore, in some traditional Islamic countries, when they talk about, for instance, Friday night, they are in fact referring to Thursday night because that night actually belongs to Friday according to their definition of a day.

Ramadan 2009

The new moon times to be used for determining the beginning and ending of Ramadan are given below for UT (Universal time) or also known as GMT (Greenwich Mean Time).

10:02 a.m. on August 20 (UT)

6:44 p.m. on September 18 (UT)

The actual time for each time zone is relative to UT. In order to calculate the Ramadan start date, compare the time of the New Moon with the Sunset in your location. If the new moon is before sunset, you should fast the next day, God willing.

Similarly, to determine the last day of fasting, compare the time of the next New Moon with the sunset in your location. If the new moon is before sunset, the month of Ramadan is complete on that day. Otherwise one needs to fast the next day.

Therefore, God willing the first day of Ramadan is August 21, 2009, and the last day of Ramadan is September 18, 2009 for North and South America. For other parts of the world, Ramadan ends one day later on September 19, 2009. However, it is a good idea to check your local sunset times to verify these dates, especially if you are in Western Europe or Western Africa.

The Night of Destiny (Night of Power) will be, God willing, on September 15, 2009, starting at sunset.

Happy, peaceful and blessed Ramadan to all, God willing.

Abdullah

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Unity of All Submitters

[2:62] Surely, those who believe, those who are Jewish, the Christians, and the converts; anyone who (1) believes in GOD, and (2) believes in the Last Day, and (3) leads a righteous life, will receive their recompense from their Lord. They have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.

Minimum Requirements For Salvation

[5:69] Surely, those who believe, those who are Jewish, the converts, and the Christians; any of them who (1) believe in GOD and (2) believe in the Last Day, and (3) lead a righteous life, have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.

I get goose-flesh whenever I read this verse. From this verse, we see that righteousness is a very important component of being a Submitter. God calls righteousness the best provision (2:197) and the best garment (7:26)

[7:26] O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness. These are some of GOD's signs, that they may take heed.

God tells us to race towards righteousness (2:148) and to compete in righteousness (5:48). In fact, God is the source of righteousness (74:56).

[74:56] They cannot take heed against GOD's will. He is the source of righteousness; He is the source of forgiveness.

Every now and then awards are given out in this world—but there's no award for "Best Submitter". At the end everyone is a winner, and everyone can share the trophy. ...the prophets, the saints, the martyrs, and the righteous. These are the best company. (4:69)

There are several benefits to being righteous.

1) If we are righteous, we get repaid for it manifold.

[2:245] Who would lend GOD a loan of righteousness, to have it repaid to them multiplied manifold? GOD is the One who provides and withholds, and to Him you will be returned.

God dislikes corruption and bribery. So if you are ethical in your work dealings, God is sure to repay you for it. In fact, we get more than an equivalent reward.

[28:84] Whoever works righteousness receives a far better reward. As for those who commit sins, the retribution for their sins is precisely equivalent to their works.

[57:11] Who would like to loan GOD a loan of righteousness, to have it multiplied for him manifold, and end up with a generous recompense?

2) Being righteous brings pardon from God. God remits our sins and you get entry to the Garden of Eden.

[4:149] If you work righteousness — either declared or concealed — or pardon a transgression, GOD is Pardoner, Omnipotent.

[64:17] If you lend GOD a loan of righteousness, He will multiply the reward for you manifold, and forgive you. GOD is Appreciative, Clement.

Conditions for Staying Within God's Protection*

[5:12] GOD had taken a covenant from the Children of Israel, and we raised among them twelve patriarchs. And GOD said, "I am with you, so long as you observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), give the obligatory charity (Zakat), and believe in My messengers and respect them, and continue to lend GOD a loan of righteousness. I will then remit your sins, and admit you into gardens with flowing streams. Anyone who disbelieves after this, has indeed strayed off the right path."

*5:12 If you fulfill the requirements stated in this verse, God will let you know that He is with you; you will have no doubt about it. Prominent among God's signs are mathematical signs for those who understand the Quran's miracle (Appendix One).

3) Being righteous protects and relieves us from injustice and adversity, harm and grief.

[20:112] As for those who worked righteousness, while believing, they will have no fear of injustice or adversity.

[39:61] And GOD will save those who have maintained righteousness; He will reward them. No harm will touch them, nor will they have any grief.

HOW CAN WE BE RIGHTEOUS

1. Righteousness Defined

[2:177] Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or the west. Righteous are those who believe in GOD, the Last Day, the angels, the scripture, and the prophets; and they give the money,

cheerfully, to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the traveling alien, the beggars, and to free the slaves; and they observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat); and they keep their word whenever they make a promise; and they steadfastly persevere in the face of persecution, hardship, and war. These are the truthful; these are the righteous.

2. Being straightforward, not evasive, or questioning, doubting, being skeptical. If you want to ask question, then ask... Don't give the third degree.

Do Not Beat Around the Bush

[2:189] They ask you about the phases of the moon! Say, "They provide a timing device for the people, and determine the time of Hajj." It is not righteous to beat around the bush; righteousness is attained by upholding the commandments and by being straightforward. You shall observe GOD, that you may succeed.

3. Reverence the rites dictated by God — Just being reverent during Salat, thinking about God while fasting.

[22:32] Indeed, those who reverence the rites decreed by GOD demonstrate the righteousness of their hearts.

4. Being forgiving and just

[42:40] Although the just requital for an injustice is an equivalent retribution, those who pardon and maintain righteousness are rewarded by GOD. He does not love the unjust.

5. Being sensitive in delicate matters of marriage and divorce.

[2:223] Your women are the bearers of your seed. Thus, you may enjoy this privilege however you like, so long as you maintain righteousness. You shall observe GOD, and know that you will meet Him. Give good news to the believers

[2:237] If you divorce them before touching them, but after you had set the dowry for them, the compensation shall be half the dowry, unless they voluntarily forfeit their rights, or the party responsible for causing the divorce chooses to forfeit the dowry. To forfeit is closer to righteousness. You shall maintain the amicable relations among you. GOD is Seer of everything you do.

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Alimony For Widows and Divorcees

[2:240] *Those who die and leave wives, a will shall provide their wives with support for a year, provided they stay within the same household. If they leave, you commit no sin by letting them do whatever they wish, so long as righteousness is maintained. GOD is Almighty, Most Wise.*

Polygamy Discouraged

[4:129] *You can never be equitable in dealing with more than one wife, no matter how hard you try. Therefore, do not be so biased as to leave one of them hanging (neither enjoying marriage, nor left to marry someone else). If you correct this situation and maintain RIGHTEOUSNESS, GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful.*

6. Being charitable is a righteous act.

[3:92] *You cannot attain righteousness until you give to charity from the possessions you love. Whatever you give to charity, GOD is fully aware thereof.*

7. Advocating righteousness

[3:104] *Let there be a community of you who invite to what is good, advocate righteousness, and forbid evil. These are the winners.*

The Best Community

[3:110] *You are the best community ever raised among the people: you advocate righteousness and forbid evil, and you believe in GOD. If the followers of the scripture believed, it would be better for them. Some of them do believe, but the majority of them are wicked.*

[3:114] *They believe in GOD and the Last Day, they advocate righteousness and forbid evil, and they hasten to do righteous works. These are the righteous.*

Arshad R / India

* * * * *

Readers in Touch

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