

## Preparing for Ramadān

Alḥamdulillah, by the grace and mercy of Allah ﷻ Ramadān is right around the corner. In just a few weeks we'll be welcoming this very special guest that comes and visits us every single year. For the past several weeks, anyone I've spoken with expresses amazement at how fast this year has gone by. It truly is amazing how time just passes us by without us really noticing. Right now we're all talking about how the year flew by so fast and after a few months we'll be saying it's amazing how Ramadan came and is already gone.

### ***Virtues of Ramadān***

But we should not let Ramadan just pass us by. Rather we should prepare for it with a level of excitement and enthusiasm. This month is so special that the Prophet ﷺ would start looking forward to it two full months in advance. It is narrated that he would say, "O Allah, bless us in Rajab and Sha'bān and allow us to reach Ramadan."<sup>1</sup> We ask Allah ﷻ to bless us in these last few week of Sha'bān and allow us to live to witness Ramadān.

It is such an amazing month that on the last day of Sha'ban the Prophet ﷺ would give a sermon reminding his companions of the virtues, blessings and rewards of this blessed month. He said, "O people! A great and blessed month has approached you, a month containing a night better than a thousand months. Allah has made fasting in its days an obligation and prayer in its nights a (recommended) voluntary act. Anyone who seeks nearness to Allah in this month through any virtuous act will be like one who carried out an obligatory act at another time (outside of Ramadan), and whoever performs an obligatory act in this month will be like one who performed seventy such acts at another time. It is the month of patience, and the reward for patience is Paradise. It is the month of equality, the month in which the wealth of the believer is increased..."<sup>2</sup>

It is the month when the gates of heaven are opened, the gates of hell are closed and the devils are chained. The Prophet ﷺ said "On the first night of Ramadan, the devils and rebellious jinn are bound in chains; the gates of Paradise are opened until not a single gate remains closed. The gates of Hell are bound shut until not a single gate remains open. Then a caller calls out, 'O desirer of good, go forth! O desirer of evil, restrain yourself! Allah is emancipating people from the Fire every night'."<sup>3</sup>

It is the month of forgiveness. The month where we can have all of our previous sins washed away. Our records can be wiped clean. Anything that we may have done in the past, no matter how bad or shameful, can be forgiven. As a matter of fact we are given

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<sup>1</sup> Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 1399

<sup>2</sup> Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb*, 115

<sup>3</sup> Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 682

three distinct opportunities to earn the forgiveness and mercy of Allah ﷻ. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever fasts the month of Ramadān with faith and expecting reward, then all his previous sins will be forgiven. Whoever stands in prayer on the night of power with faith and expecting reward, then all his previous sins will be forgiven.”<sup>4</sup> In another narration the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever stands in prayer at night in Ramadān with faith and expecting reward, then all his previous sins will be forgiven.”<sup>5</sup> Most commentators explain that this is referring to tarāwīḥ prayer.

This is the month where we have the opportunity to be amongst those people that will enter Paradise through a special gate called al-Rayyān. The Prophet ﷺ said, “In Paradise there is a gate that is called al-Rayyān through which only those who observe fasting will enter on the Day of Judgment. No one else will enter through it except for them.”<sup>6</sup> There are a number of other narrations that talk about the virtues, blessings and rewards of this month. After reading all of these narrations we should feel a sense of excitement and enthusiasm.

### ***Why is Ramadān so Special?***

Now the question should come to our minds, “Why has Allah given us so many unique opportunities in this month? What’s so special about Ramadan?” Allah ﷻ gives us a hint to the answer telling us, “The month of Ramadan in which the Qur’ān was revealed as a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion.”<sup>7</sup>

This is the month in which Allah ﷻ chose to reveal the Qur’ān, the last and final message sent for the guidance of humanity until the end of times. The main reason why this month is so special because it is the month in which Allah ﷻ chose to re-establish the connection between the heavens and the earth. The month in which He chose to reveal His divine, eternal, uncreated speech upon the heart of His beloved messenger, Muḥammad ﷺ. The Qur’ān is the greatest miracle given to the Prophet ﷺ. It is an everlasting miracle whose miraculous nature can be felt and experienced till this day. That is one of the reasons why we should dedicate our Ramadān to the Qur’ān in terms of recitation, learning and understanding.

### ***The Purpose of Fasting***

Allah ﷻ has given so many unique opportunities this month because He wants us to be successful. Allah ﷻ commanded us to fast as an act of obedience and worship to Him. It is something that we have to do, except for those who are excused. And even

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<sup>4</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 759

<sup>6</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1217

<sup>7</sup> 2:185

though it's something we have to do Allah ﷻ has placed unimaginable benefits and rewards in it for us.

Most scholars agree that Islamic Law, the rulings and regulations, are based on some type of rationale. There is some sort of wisdom and reason behind every ruling. Every ruling brings some type of benefit or removes some type of harm. Sometimes as human beings we understand that wisdom, sometimes we don't and sometimes Allah ﷻ Himself tells us what that wisdom is.

Allah ﷻ tells us the reason or the rationale behind fasting. "O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may attain taqwa." Whenever we read or hear the phrase "O you who believe" our ears should perk up and we should pay attention. This is Allah ﷻ addressing us directly. Ibn 'Abbās (ra) said that whenever Allah calls us He is either directing us towards some benefit or warning us of some harm.

In this verse He has commanded us to fast and told us the reason why; to attain taqwa. Oftentimes taqwa is translated as the fear of Allah ﷻ. This is not the best translation because it doesn't capture the essence or reality of what taqwa truly is. Taqwa is more of a state of mind, a unique type of consciousness and level of awareness. Taqwa is being aware and conscious of the fact that Allah ﷻ exists, that He alone is the creator of the heavens and the earth and everything they contain. It is being aware and conscious of the reality that Allah is the All-Knowing, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the Sustainer, the Provider, the One Who gives life and the One Who gives death. It is being conscious of the fact that all of our sayings and actions are being recorded and that we will be held accountable for them on the Day of Judgment. This consciousness and awareness then drives and directs our behavior. That is why most commentators describe taqwa as obeying the commands of Allah ﷻ and staying away from His prohibitions.

The relationship between fasting and taqwa is that fasting trains our nafs (self) in self-control. Fasting is training us how to control our most basic and carnal desires. We are controlling our desire for food, drink and intimacy in order to seek the pleasure of Allah ﷻ. The rationale is that if we can stay away from things that are normally permissible for a long period of time, then we should definitely be able to stay away from those things that are impermissible.

However, it is important for us to recognize that simply fasting will not guarantee us taqwa. That is why Allah ﷻ says "so that perhaps you may attain taqwa". In order to do so we have to work hard. Fasting isn't simply a physical act. We're not just fasting with our stomachs by staying away from food and drink. Rather our eyes should be fasting, our ears should be fasting, our tongues should be fasting and our hearts and minds should be fasting. That is the essence and reality of a true fast. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions, Allah is not in need of his leaving his

food and drink (i.e. Allah will not accept his fasting.)"<sup>8</sup> This is how we will truly benefit from the month of Ramadan and work towards attaining taqwa.

Fasting is the most powerful tool in strengthening our ability to control our most powerful desires. The ability to control these desires and our nafs is the essence of the test of this life. That is one of the reasons why fasting is one of the greatest acts of worship and one of the most highly rewarded. The promise of reward, happiness and success is one of the greatest motivating factors that exist. As the Prophet ﷺ told us in a ḥadīth qudsī, Allah ﷻ said, "Every single act of the son of Adam is for himself, except for fasting. It is for me and I reward it..."<sup>9</sup>

### ***Preparation***

Now in order for us to take advantage of all these unique blessings that are provided in this month, we have to start preparing from now. Preparation is an essential step in every single thing we do. Whatever we do in life we usually do it after preparation. The general rule is that when something is done without preparation it leads to failure. The Prophet ﷺ told us, "There is no intelligence like planning." The following are four practical things we can do to prepare ourselves for the month of Ramadān.

- 1) Make a habit of praying 5 times a day - Prayer is the most important act of worship after faith. It is considered to be the foundation or pillar of religious practice. The importance of prayer can't be overemphasized. But when it comes to prayer each of us are on a different level. Perhaps some of us struggle to pray five times a day. Perhaps some of us struggle with a specific prayer such as fajr. Maybe some of us pray five times a day but have a hard time concentrating in prayer. Now is the time to change that.
- 2) Make a habit of coming to the masjid daily - The amount of blessings, virtue, rewards and benefits of coming to the masjid are unimaginable. The masjid has to be an essential part of our daily lives. Just like we make time for sports, the gym, work and school, we have to make time for the masjid.
- 3) Make a habit of reading the Qur'ān - As mentioned earlier the month of Ramadān is the month of the Qur'ān. We should set realistic goals for our recitation throughout the month. For some this may be doing several completions of the Qur'ān, for others one and for others perhaps even reading a few pages or verses a day. Whatever it may be we should set realistic goals that we can achieve and maintain on a regular and consistent basis.
- 4) Start weaning ourselves off of bad habits - This is perhaps one of the most difficult things to do. Oftentimes we start the month of Ramadān and we find that we are still engaging in some bad habits. That is because there is not automatic off switch. It takes

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<sup>8</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1903

<sup>9</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1151

time to change our habits. Now is a good time to start changing our habits and adjusting our schedules so that we can derive maximum benefit from the month.

May Allah ﷻ accept all our fasts, prayers, charity and any other act of righteousness we do in this blessed month and make it a means for us to attain the forgiveness and mercy of Allah ﷻ. Āmīn!

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