

Why do Muslims Fast? What is the point of going without food and water everyday for one whole month?

An Act of Ibadah (Worship)

According to many sayings of Allah's noble Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him), Ramadan is a great and blessed month. Fasting during this month constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam. It is an act of worship which is done to please Allah. Like the other pillars (Declaration of Faith, Salah, Zakah and Hajj) fasting helps to produce and nurture a whole range of positive values and qualities in both individual and community life. In particular, through fasting a person can develop piety, strengthen their conviction in God, and develop moral character. Let us see how:

Building Taqwa (God-Consciousness)

First, fasting helps to develop God-Consciousness (Taqwa). According to Islam, this is the seed to all good. A God-conscious heart is in actual fact a driving force for positive action. It is a fundamental prerequisite for self-purification, self-inspiration, self-motivation, and for selfless sacrifices and contributions towards the development and welfare of society. Taqwa

also brings peace and tranquillity to hearts, creates energy in individuals for righteous action, forges brotherhood and sisterhood and cultivates community spirit.

Building Brotherhood

Second, fasting nurtures brotherhood and sisterhood, which is essential for the development of a strong community life.

Fasting is such an act that brings people together a number of times a day; at sahoor (pre-dawn meal), iftaar (sunset meal), and Tarawih prayers (special night prayers), in addition to the normal five prayer times. Also Ramadan is a month of sharing, of giving Sadaqah (voluntary charity), of paying Zakah (compulsory charity). The Prophet (PBUH) said:

" If someone gives one who has been fasting something with which to break his fast, it will provide forgiveness for his sins."

Through all these means a strong sense of purpose and community is cultivated.

Building a Relationship with Qur'an

Third, Ramadan is the month in which the Glorious Qur'an was revealed. Thus, fasting in this month brings the Muslims closer to the Qur'an. In many parts of the world, Muslims aim to complete at least one reading of the Qur'an in this blessed month, especially during the night prayers (Tarawih).

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

"He in whose heart there is no part of the Qur'an is like a deserted house."

This helps to remind the Muslim community of the message contained in the Qur'an and their purpose and mission in life. This is therefore a powerful means for revitalising the Muslim community.

Building Patience & Steadfastness

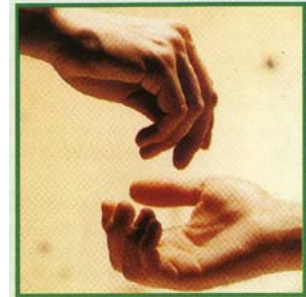
Fourth, fasting cultivates Sabr (i.e. patience and fortitude) amongst the Muslims. Through fasting Muslims learn to be patient and to endure hunger and thirst. This also helps them to understand the sufferings of the poor and needy people in our world thus generating compassion and a feeling to help others. Sabr is also an essential quality required for pursuing the mission of Islam - a mission to enjoin the good and forbid the wrong; to establish peace and justice in society and the world for all people.

Building Self and Social Discipline

Finally, fasting during the month of Ramadan produces discipline and order in the life of Muslims. The waking times, prayer times, time to break the fast, and so on, all help to create order and coordinate the actions of the Muslim community. Again, like Sabr, discipline is also an important ingredient for pursuing the mission of Islam.

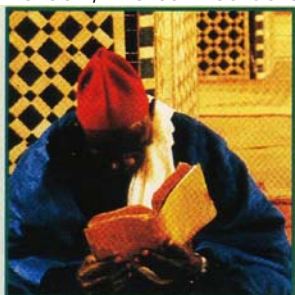
Community Relationships

The above points highlight how fasting, together with the other pillars of Islam, act as a powerful glue that keeps Muslims together in a community. Each pillar, if understood and practiced properly, can contribute in the purification and development of the inner self as well as in social development. They bring community members together (rich and poor), aid in the cultivation of a strong relationship with Allah, affect attitudes positively and strengthen relationships between members of the community. All these are the seeds for effective community development.



The Importance of Knowing Why?

Every year during the blessed month of Ramadan, we see Muslims flock to the mosque in great numbers. During this month the mosques get filled, the feeling of piety and Godliness is generated; hearts become soft, people engage in Zikr (remembrance of God), in reading of the Qur'an, in prayers, tears flow before God as people earnestly seek His Forgiveness and Mercy, acts of Ibadah increase with more sincerity, devotion and humbleness, etc. However, soon after Ramadan is over, the feeling of piety weakens, hearts become negligent of God, mosques become empty, contact with the Qur'an is reduced, and God is little remembered. None or very little change occurs in our family and community life, our problems continue and worsen, life carries us on in pursuing our own agendas, ambitions, careers, interests, etc.



All that we achieve during the great month of Ramadan seem to completely vanish. This happens because many Muslims have forgotten why they fast. For too many it is staying without food and drink. This is why once Ramadan is over, many feel that the objective has been achieved and that they can now continue with their normal routine of life. They have not fully grasped the whole

purpose of fasting and its relationship with the general body of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reminded Muslims:

"Whoever fasts during Ramadan with faith and seeking reward from God will have their past sins forgiven; whoever prays during the night in Ramadan with faith and seeking reward from God will have their past sins forgiven; whoever passes Laylat al-Qadr (night of power) in prayer with faith and seeking reward from God will have their past sins forgiven." (Bukhari and Muslim).

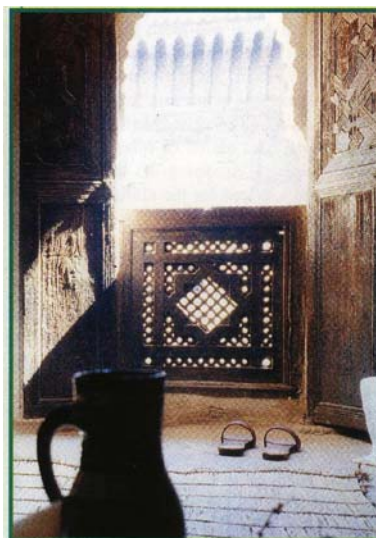
"Many are the tasters who get nothing from their fast except (hunger) and thirst, and many are those who pray during the nights but gain nothing from their prayers except wakefulness". (Daarimi).

"If one does not give up falsehood and actions in accordance with it (fasting), God has no need that he/she should give up food and drink." (Bukhari).

It is therefore important not to lose sight of the real purpose of fasting and the great qualities that can be produced in people through this act of worship. Sincere and real fasting should directly affect our lives. It should strengthen our relationship with Allah and motivate people to strive for building a God-centred society. Fasting should not be seen as an objective in itself, but as a powerful means for fulfilling the Islamic purpose in human life and society. Ramadan is a springboard which energises Muslims for the rest of the year. It is a powerful month of spiritual, moral, physical and social training - equipping the Muslim for the many struggles ahead - indeed for the ultimate struggle to bring society to the worship of God.

The Islamic Society of Britain

The Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) is a national organisation with branches throughout the UK. It was established in 1990 and its vision is to 'Enable and Inspire People to Live by Islam' by introducing Islam to the people of Britain. The national membership comes from all walks of life including converts to Islam. The Young Muslims UK (YM) is the youth wing of ISB and caters for the needs of the youth of today. The ISB is not just another group - rather it is about bringing Muslims together regardless of their gender, Madhhab (school of thought), ethnic background, or colour. It is a meeting point for all concerned Muslims who see Britain as their society and as their home. Together we hope to make Britain better. Please join us and help us.



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