

life. Thinking like this has led us on a downward spiral & we have more anxiety & depression than we've ever had before. Fasting can fix such ills. Start to study the Quran & you will feel great peace & comfort & your confusion will lessen & your anxiety will disappear. **When God is at the center of your priority in life then you are at the center of God's Providential Care.**

Ramadan gives the correct perspective.

Fasting is a recommended act in Islam but during Ramadan it becomes an obligatory religious duty. The fasting from the first sign of dawn to sunset is not only abstention from food, drink & sexual pleasures but also from all evil thoughts & deeds. No spiritual pollution is to be tolerated. It is a rigorous means of self-purification. It is as if one were to wear the armour of God against the world. Hundreds of millions at the same time standing against temptations of all sorts by a command from God. No political party or social network has this power.

Ramadan is Global Power.

The ordeal of fasting has its spiritual significance first & foremost in that we consciously obey a Divine commandment. But in addition it is the means by which we pull the reins of our animal desires & realize that **we are more than an animal**. As long as we follow our passions & inclinations completely we differ little from the animals, except that they are innocent & true to their nature **while we are not**. It is only when we exert our spiritual will through fasting against our animal inclinations that we realize our higher nature. **Even the sensual enjoyments become heightened through denial**. Example: The faster experiences intense enjoyment when he breaks his fast with the first sip, said the Prophet (p).

Heightened enjoyment, indeed! Those who do not fast experience a dulling of their sensual senses. On their faces they carry a permanent, constipated look. Food becomes a buffer for the imbalance they feel in their lives. Therefore, the experience of this month of fasting makes us more appreciative of the gifts that God has bestowed upon us & which we usually take for granted...when our lives line up with the deep aspirations of our souls.

During this month the gates of heaven are more open & the Muslim individual as well as the community are able to purify themselves with the aid of Divine grace & renew the spiritual energy of society. If from the end of last Ramadan to this one the society did NOT benefit from your spiritual energy gained then, how is it to be expected that things will be different this time around. God is not in need of our hunger & thirst. Our immense widening of our faculty of perception through fasting & its use in benefitting society is what God expects. Our new spiritual insights must spur us on in doing real "good"...

This is a month for serious introspection. For rebuilding of our characters & reconstruction of our souls & re-engineering of our hearts. Ask the hard questions & look sincerely for answers...**while you PRAY**. Do you suffer from anger problems? Feeling envious? Showing off? Do you feel hatred towards someone but feel bad about it & want to change that? Are you stingy & want to become generous? Lying? Stealing? Cheating on your spouse? Drinking with the boys? Taking drugs? Wasting the most precious commodity known to us...TIME...on lewd music, movies.

The "moral habit" engendered by Ramadan is a powerful factor making not only for individual righteousness but also for effective social cooperation & cultural progress. There should **not** be a gradual receding from this habit until the next Ramadan. You must be convinced that observance of Fasting will lead to a fuller, more satisfying life. **"And it is better for you that you fast, if you only knew."** (2:184) What could be a better choice of words by God Himself to stimulate us to action: **if you only knew**. There are physical, mental, spiritual, psychological & social benefits that accrue from Fasting. It gives us so many goals. The tragedy of life does not lie in not reaching our goal. The tragedy of life lies in having no goal to reach. Be grateful for Ramadan.

The painful experiences of evil pass away as the new experiences of good enter into & possess the field of consciousness. What are these new experiences of good? They are many & beautiful – such as the joyful knowledge of freedom from sin; the absence of remorse; deliverance from all the torments of temptation; ineffable joy in conditions & circumstances which formerly caused deep affliction; imperviousness to hurt by the actions of others; great patience & sweetness of character; serenity of mind under all circumstances; emancipation from doubt, fear & anxiety; freedom from all dislike, envy & enmity.

Ramadan should make us COMPLETE & spiritually mature. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for – the closeness of God. When exercised with a pure heart & a right motive, fasting provides us with a key to unlock doors where other keys have failed; a window opening up new horizons in the unseen world; a spiritual weapon of God's provision, mighty, to the pulling down of strongholds. We should have become like a strong tree whose roots are fed by heavenly perennial springs, and which no earthly tempest can lay low. **Why then, every year, Ramadan finds us at the seedling stage?**

A properly done Fast demands immediate marriage to **action**.

O RAMADAN...

**THE BELIEVER LAUGHS AT YOUR COMING
& WEEPS AT YOUR PASSING...**

...FOR THE SOUL Nutrition

**FILLING UP WITH SPIRITUAL FOOD RATHER
THAN REFRAINING FROM EATING MATERIAL FOOD**

Ramadan is quite a profound experience, of new stillness & grounded-ness. Have you realized how little stillness, how little grounded-ness there is around. We're a restless, rootless society – swamping ourselves with relentless communication, consumption & comfort. We're increasingly **'entertained to death.'** We have to acknowledge that our behaviour is **abnormal**: few if any societies in human history have tried to live such a non-stop lifestyle. It's been normal in human history (and remains normal in most of the world today) for people to stop, to slow down, and to reflect in the course of their lives.

Most cultures have rest days when the work stops. Many cultures have times of fasting. And surely few people have ever tried to keep themselves as busy, as wired, as on-the-go as we do. We must dare to step off the treadmill, and **to stop producing**. To look inside & reflect. Maybe out of that stillness & reflection, we can hope for new wisdom, visions & lifestyles...for a more whole society, a more loving relationship with the natural order...the order of God.

Ramadan demonstrates a shift in thinking, a redefinition of the dividing lines – in order to maximize the potential for Peace. In a world that enshrines the belief that violence saves, that war brings peace, that might makes right – in the **'myth of redemptive violence,'** let Muslims show the only belief that truly matters. That Fasting for God brings forth the **'truth of redemptive peace.'** Ramadan is a month where we can wrest human needs & desires from the grip of consumerism, and channel them instead to build a movement for spiritual change.

Or. Are our spiritual leaders caught in the **vice-like grip of materialism** themselves?

MUHAMMAD ASAD

: "Two-fold I learnt is the purpose of fasting.

One has to abstain from food & drink in order to feel in one's body what the poor & hungry feel. Thus, social responsibility is being hammered into our religious consciousness as a religious postulate. The other purpose is self-discipline, an aspect of individual morality strongly accentuated in all Islamic teachings. As for instance in the total prohibition of all intoxicants which Islam regards as too easy an avenue of escape from consciousness & responsibility. In these two elements – brotherhood of man & individual self-discipline – I began to discern the outlines of Islam's ethical outlook."

What have we discerned?

Do you have a hunger for God? If we don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because we have drunk deeply & are satisfied. It is because we have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Our soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. If we are full of what the world offers, then perhaps a fast might express, or even increase, our soul's appetite for God. Between the dangers of self-denial & self-indulgence is the path of fasting.

Ramadan brings beauty to the heart.

In a techno-consumer culture enraptured with externals & superficiality, the tendency toward spirituality can represent a struggle to value, protect & embody those qualities that are most hidden in oneself, the qualities of the soul. In a time when our world grows increasingly wed to surfaces, we need to actively protect & foster that which is hidden from the eye of superficial vision. We need God more than ever now. We need Him in order to remember, to revalue what we have left behind as the "childish" dreams of youth & innocence, to remind us of unseen & invisible worlds. So the task of the Quranic verse "Ramadan is the month in which the Quran was sent down" is not to simply describe or convey what is seen on the page, but to be a reminder of how, when what is seen penetrates the depths of our silences, vision opens & can transfigure reality. The real act of "fasting" happens in the heart, not on the page.

Ramadan encourages action.

People need religion in order to remember that the soul exists. Sometimes our lives take us away from who we deeply are into a façade that we live in for years. Yet amidst this numbness an aching hunger for meaning & beauty, for a home in one's own being, persists. We long for a time when we will feel fully at home in ourselves & lives. Wildly alive in ways which we have only glimpsed. We want life to be rich with love, full of gifts given & shared, a continual praising.

Ramadan brings joy to life.

In the wasteland of exile from your soul, how you wander aimlessly & throw yourself into various occupations, trying to forget. How you long for one who might hear & see you & coax you into the becoming you know is possible. You are vast as the universe. Inwardly you sense that nothing you do here will ever equal what you are actually capable of. Redemption seems to spring from the very barrenness that you have let claim your life's voice. From the interior loneliness of finding yourself isolated from other beings, and from love, something new is often born. You must stand up for innocence & soul sweetness, for beauty that is constantly assaulted by hollow, shallow & cynical images that repeat the mantra "There is no meaning here."

Ramadan gives deep meaning.

Each of us, male and female, has a harsh, critical and often assassinating inner voice that functions as henchman to what is mysterious and soulful in us. When you feel sadness it tells you that you are a sissy, or irrational or pathetic. When you feel something in your gut, it tells you to be logical & to filter everything through rational thinking. It says discipline is what you need, and it rules through control. It tells you that you must achieve & conquer, that you are nothing except what you produce, that otherwise your life has no meaning or value. Success is tangible & worldly & power is what you should possess & desire. This voice within tells you to get over yourself & your broken heart.

There is a time when that voice is needed to move you through the ruts of self-pity or self-defeated lethargy. But more often that voice becomes a willful dictator, robbing your life of its vitality, its quiet joys & potential for contentment. The voice of what you should be, do, or fix in your life distances you from your soul's innocent curiosity. There is a part of you, however small & buried, that has utter faith in life, that is willing to go wherever you are taken, that looks out upon this precious existence with wonder & praising, for the simple blades of grass, for the smell of the earth, for the warm flesh of your loved one and laughter. This

part sometimes breaks through the mask of control & affirms the childlike innocence of your heart. There is a moment when the rational discursive thinking breaks through to the symbolic, feeling language of rhythm & image hidden in your blood.

Ramadan gives you faith.

Such a moment arrives annually, at the glimpse of the crescent of Ramadan. It's time for your heart to soften & gaze upon the Mercy of God with tearful eyes. With lips trembling in awe seeking His Forgiveness, which is easily given. Where the limitations of rational language appear, the soul must find a way through to greater truth. Ramadan is both a veil & the rending of the veil covering Reality. We come to know God, deeply.

Ramadan is a time for whisperings. With raised hands & bowed heads our lips move according to the rhythm of our inner voice. This inner voice is designed to reveal much more than other kinds of language can reveal about the complex multidimensionality of such an intense spiritual experience. Is it straightforward? Is it the language of therapeutic self-disclosure? **No, it is not.** Which kind of language glimpses a fuller, richer more mysterious experience? Which feels more real to you? Which is more vulnerable/exposed. And God listens...to the murmurings of this inner voice more than any other. He loves the unfolding of the sacred inwardness of one's own precious vision. Inwardness has been given no value in the world, in culture, yet it is where everything is conceived, ripened & born. Will you protect & value your own inner life, even if there is never any applause or money or accomplishment you can hold up as its outer sign? Will you give your life, through Fasting, to becoming tender-hearted – to learn how to truly see?

Ramadan gives true 20/20 spiritual vision.

Being **blind**: The issue of being overly-concerned with outward appearance is almost epidemic nowadays. People's fixation with the external & material world, as well as with their own personal self have increased to the point of no return. **It is as though we have turned into shells with nothing going on inside.** This is largely due to a lack of attention and focus on organized religion while at the same time there is so much attention from the media on external physical beauty; things like being athletic & fashionable. More focus on hair, makeup & cosmetic surgery. Young people are being told that all they have to do is look good & then everything else in life will automatically just work out & they will have a happy

THE SENSUOUS MAN & WOMAN IS FROLICKING; THERE IS UNIVERSAL INTOXICATION; FIRST WORLD GLUTTONY

BUT THOSE WHO BELIEVE **FAST...IF YOU ONLY KNEW** QURAN: 2:184

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