

moral aims or enter the Kingdom of God unless they uproot themselves from the stem of worldly affairs. Accordingly, it becomes necessary for such a person to divorce their mundane interests, neglect their human responsibilities & resort to some kind of self-torture or severe asceticism of which fasting is an essential part & it has been used as a **pretext to cover the humiliating retreat from life.**

Even the timetable of the Islamic Fast is a striking phenomenon. In other creeds the timing of fasting is fixed at a certain time of the year in a most inflexible way. But in Islam the time comes with the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the year. The Islamic Calendar is a **lunar** one. Thus over a period of a number of years the Fast covers the differing seasons (rainy, sunny in the Tropics; Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn in the Temperate zones). In a spiritual sense the Muslim enjoys the inner experience of fasting on various levels, and can taste its spiritual flavours at variant seasons. This variety of experience remains at all times an impressive feature of the liveliness of the Islamic institution. It also stands as an unailing expression of dynamism, adaptability & readiness on the part of the believer. This is certainly a healthy, remarkable component of the teachings of Islam.

The spiritual meaning of the Islamic Fast teaches a person the principle of sincere Love; because when a person observes the Fast they do so out of deep love for God. And the person who loves God truly is a person who knows what love is. Fasting equips a person with a creative sense of hope and an **optimistic** outlook on life; because when they fast they are **hoping** to please God and is seeking His Grace. Fasting imbues a person with a genuine virtue of effective devotion, honest dedication and closeness to God; because when they Fast they do so for God & for His sake alone.

Fasting cultivates a vigilant & sound conscience, and there is no better way to do so; because the Fasting person keeps his Fast in secret as well as in public. To please God. In Fasting, especially, there is no mundane authority to check a person's behaviour or compel them to observe the Fast. Fasting indoctrinates a person in patience & unselfishness; because when they fast they feel the pains of deprivation but endures patiently. This deprivation may be only temporary, yet there is no doubt that the experience makes a person realize the severe effects of such pains over weeks or months or lifetimes. Fasting is a time when our own

self-induced hunger should bring us closer to those whose **hunger is caused by circumstance, not choice.** Closer to the hungry means closer to God. In this blessed month, do what you are able for those in need, **whose hunger & pain will outlast this brief month.**

The meaning of this fasting experience in a social & humanitarian sense is that such a person is much quicker than others in sympathizing with & responding to the needs of the poor/afflicted/displaced. The eloquent expression of unselfishness & genuine sympathy comes with an effective lesson in applied moderation and willpower. The person who observes their Fast properly is certainly one who can discipline & place the self above physical temptations. Such is the person of personality & character, the person of strength & determination. Fasting provides a transparent soul to transcend, a clear mind to think, and a light body to move and act. Here is the never-failing result of carrying a light stomach. Medical instructions, biological rules & intellectual experience all attest to this fact.

Fasting grounds a person in discipline & healthy survival. When a person observes the regular course of Fasting in consecutive days of the Holy Month & in the Holy Months of the consecutive years, they are certainly applying themselves to a high form of discipline & a superb sense of order. Fasting originates in a person the real spirit of social belonging, of unity & brotherhood, of equality before God as well as before the law. This spirit is the natural product of a fact of Muslim life: when a person fasts, they feel they are joining the whole Muslim society in observing the **same** duty in the **same** manner at the **same** time for the **same** motives to the **same** end.

People have been crying throughout the ages for acceptable belonging, for unity, for brotherhood, for equality, but how **echo-less** their voice has been, and how little they succeeded. **Fasting is a Divine Prescription** for self-reassurance & self-control, for the maintenance of human dignity & freedom, for victory & peace. For a revival of hearts. Keep polishing after the intense & limited time of the spiritually powerful days of Ramadan training has ended. Your polished heart will now create a global echo throughout the year that succeeds.

Fasting: A Divinely appointed means of grace. It helps us to have our bearings right, the right sense of destination, the right navigational equipment, and an inbuilt system of correcting the course & raising an alarm, in case one begins to zigzag or go dangerously astray.

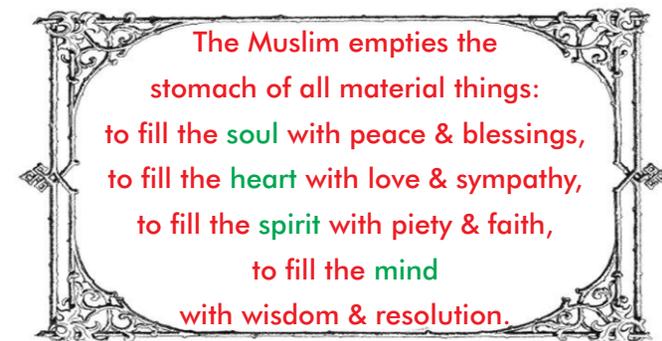
THE RAMADAN: REVIVE & POLISH YOUR HEART HEARTBEAT

Let's all walk together to the step of that vast heartbeat that is ringing, ever stronger & brighter, rising, from the hearts of all those sincere brothers & sisters...in the month called **Ramadan:**

Fasting is **not** just about giving up food & drink. **It's about tending to the better angels of our nature.** The Prophet (p) said, "If one is **not** willing to give up **bad behaviour** during their fast, God has **no** need for them to give up their food & drink." Muslims are encouraged during this time to be better people, to treat others with more deference.

If enticed to argue, the faster is advised to respond: "I am fasting." This means they are in a spiritual awareness of God.

Empty stomachs, but full souls:
Dimensions of a unique spiritual odyssey
of nourishment.



IN ISLAM, THE FAST IS NO ESCAPE FROM LIVING BUT A HAPPY MARRIAGE WITH IT, NOT A RETREAT BUT A PENETRATION WITH SPIRITUAL ARMAMENTS, NOT A NEGLIGENCE BUT A MORAL ENRICHMENT. THE ISLAMIC FAST DOES NOT DIVORCE RELIGION FROM DAILY LIFE OR SEPARATE THE SOUL FROM THE BODY. IT DOES NOT BREAK BUT HARMONIZES. IT DOES NOT DISSOLVE BUT TRANSFUSES. IT DOES NOT DISINTEGRATE BUT BRIDGES & REDEEMS.

The month that stands apart in all the year is upon us. Upon us, the time when Muslims stand close, one heartbeat across the earth. Rebirth to all who try; who try harder: upon us. This Ramadan month.

Humanity was reborn when this gift came back to us, in this month. This Islam, Glorious Islam. Through this guide, this extraordinary man, Muhammad (p). With this Quran of God, this miracle, this mercy, full & clear, pure.

Perfection of the Quran which never ceases to unfold: no matter how many times you have read it, the new reading will radiate new connections, deeper threads. A farther Truth. Ramadan is the month to read & re-read the Quran. To truly study it. Like in...S.T.U.D.Y.

“Read.” We know the word as the **first** sound Muhammad (p) heard the angel of Allah speak. Now we see its innermost meaning, the power & the responsibility: how Allah raised man above all Creation. For what else is there in creation that can do this astounding thing – **R.E.A.D.** And **think? Only we.** Repeat...Only we. And it is our mark, and it is our challenge, by Allah’s infinite benevolence & design. When we have “read” (learned), we act; when we act, we **interact.** A billion heartbeats pound to a billion fellow pulses, to the very Rhythm of Creation.

The **second** message said: “**By the pen, you are not mad Muhammad...This is nothing less than a message to all the worlds.**” (68:52) Believe. Understand. Teach. It said.

And the **third** called out. Al-Muzzammil! **O you** folded in the garments of prayer, far from this world’s vanities: “Remember the Name of your Lord, the Lord of the East & of the West...And establish regular prayer & give Zakat (charity) & loan to Allah...A Beautiful Loan.” **Has there ever been a more breathtaking concept?** The entire universe held & willed by the Code-Maker to a code so rooted in generosity, generosity becomes the very shape & mould of worship! The worship of Allah is His Right. The mutual care between people is our right. More: our task, our triumph, our reward.

And the **fourth** message rang (74): Al-Mudaththir! **O you clothed & wrapped up, soul bare & open before Allah.** “Arise & deliver your warning! And your Lord do Magnify! And for the sake of your Lord be patient in hardship.” Worship. Defined action. Patience – profound, fair. “**He is the Lord of Righteousness, the Lord of Forgiveness.**” Forgiveness. In these surahs is the heart of Islam, all of it, all the deepest part of it.

The Fast of Ramadan is its heartbeat. The stroke of each hour & day that proclaims, we are Muslims: aware, enabled; caring, thankful.

A real community on a real communal climb to elevation. The Fast in Ramadan was stipulated only on that day the Muslim community truly became a community. And Ramadan marks our elevation among other people: for our belief is **not** afraid of being tested to the core, the longest test.

This Fast is also the always-renewed badge of humanity’s elevation. We who are not just the creation that can think: we who are the only creation that can “**Choose.**” No other part of creation can stop its urge to eat when hungry, for God. No other can recognize the bond and the promise. Allah has endowed us with this will, this incipient greatness.

And when the month has ended, we do rise. We surely have been reborn, as on that Night in a cave at Makkah. We have gone, dauntless, the step beyond biology, to freedom – we have defied the false & empty chains; we have disrupted the hardness of the selfish heart; we have not given up or given in. We have been guided by a commitment of the heart unique on the face of the earth. We do it for Allah. In truth, this which Allah asks of us is but another precious gift. “A beautiful loan” of

ourselves to Allah, of which we are the real recipients. “And whatever good you send forth for yourselves you shall find it with Allah, yes & better & greater a reward.” (73:20) We need not even wait; the reward is immediate, in the days of true power, the nights of peace. And no matter what the year has brought, in the annual Fast for Allah, we are never lonely. The very Surah which follows the Ramadan injunctions, 2:186: “And when My servants ask you concerning Me tell them I indeed am very near. I hear and answer the call of the caller whenever he calls Me. So let them listen to My call and believe in Me.” Very Near. Praise be to Allah!

The Transformation

In other religions and dogmas, in other philosophies and doctrines, the observer of a Fast abstains from certain kinds of food, or drinks, or material substances, but he is free to substitute for these, to fill his stomach to the top with the substitution, also of material nature. In Islam one abstains from the things of material nature in order to attain spiritual joys and moral nourishment.

The purpose of fasting in other religions & philosophies is invariably partial. It is either for spiritual aims, physical needs, or intellectual cultivation: never for all of these combined. But in Islam it is for **all these gains** & other purposes; social & economic, moral & humanitarian, private & public, personal & common, inner & outer, local, national & international. The non-Islamic fasting does not demand more than partial abstinence from certain material things.

But the Islamic Fast is accompanied by extra devotion & worship, extra charity & study of the Quran, extra sociability & liveliness, extra-self-discipline & conscience-awakening. Thus the Fasting transforms a Muslim into a different person altogether. A Muslim becomes so pure & clean inside as well as out, and their soul is so transparent that they feel close to perfection, because they are growing so near to God.

To the best of our knowledge and on the authority of daily experience, other moral philosophies & religions teach a person that they cannot attain their

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