

machinery, engine, and rockets. The lightning speed with which we advanced in computers, chips, lasers, satellites, fabric, technology etc. are highly honored as they may lead some to the realization of the power of Almighty Allah.

Ramadan Nightly Prayer (*Taraweeh*)

Allah (SWT) has mandated to His servants acts of worship and made them of various kinds so as to provide them with means to pick and choose, and that others will not be bored with one act. Thus, we seek nearness to Him, through mandatory and non-mandatory deeds. Among the non-mandatory deeds, or Sunnahs, is the establishment of night time prayers (*salatul lail*), and Allah has praised those who observe them.

“Those who spend the night in adoration of their Lord, prostrate and standing.”

(Al-Qur'an 25:64)

“Their limbs do forsake their beds of sleep, the while they call on their Lord in fear and hope and they spend (in charity) out of the sustenance which we have bestowed on them.”

(Al-Qur'an 32:16)

These two verses indicate the basis for nightly prayer in *Al-Qur'an* and the good return awaiting those who observe it. In a hadith, the Messenger of Allah (saas) says:

“The best prayer after the obligatory ones is the night prayer.” (Muslim)

Elsewhere he says:

“O people! disseminate the salutations of peace *As-Salaam 'Alaikum*; feed the needy food, and join the blood ties among the next of kin; and observe night prayer while people are at sleep, you will enter paradise peacefully.” (Tirmidhi)

One of the night prayers, is *Witr*, the odd numbered bedtime prayer. It should be the last prayer said before retiring. The

minimum *Witr* is one *rak'ah* and the maximum is eleven raka'ats. The Prophet (saas) said:

“Whoever wants to pray *Witr* with one rak'ah should do it and whoever wants to pray *Witr* with three raka'ats should do it.” (Abu Dawud/Nasa'e)

However, the Messenger of Allah (saas) was always consistent with eleven raka'ats for night prayers, according to his wife, 'Aishah (raa) who reported:

“The Prophet never observed prayers after `Isha (night obligatory prayer) and before Fajr (morning prayer), more than eleven raka'ats. He saluted after every two raka'ats, and he prayed *Witr* with one raka'at.” (Jama'ah, except Tirmidhi)

In a different procedure, one may make four raka'ats, and salute, and continue with another four and salute, then he caps them with three raka'ats of *Witr*. 'Aishah (raa) reported:

“The Prophet used to pray four raka'ats and one cannot describe their beauty, and their length, (he salutes) then makes another set of four raka'ats, one cannot describe their beauty and length, he then caps it with three raka'ats.” (Agreed upon)

Taraweeh

The Ramadan nightly prayer has a special merit over other nights. The Messenger of Allah said:

“Whoever observes night prayer in Ramadan as an expression of his faith and to seek reward from Allah, his previous sins will be blotted out.” (Muslim)

In this hadith, faith means faith in what Allah has promised the observers of night prayers. To seek reward mean, the observer's intent is not for eye service or seeking special recognition from someone.

Taraweeh is derived from the Arabic root word, *raaha*, which means to rest, relax and use as recreation. It is so called because the believers used to prolong it. After every four *raka'ats* they would stop for rest and relaxation and resume until taraweeh was complete.

Taraweeh In Jamaa`ah

The Messenger of Allah (saas) was the first to establish the Sunnah of congregational, *jamaa`ah* prayer of taraweeh in the Masjid. Then he did not continue with the Sunnah for fear that it might be made mandatory on the Ummah in Ramadan, and they might not be able to do it. In the books of Bukhari and Muslim, 'Aishah (raa) has been reported as saying:

“The Messenger of Allah (saas) observed *Taraweeh* prayer in the Masjid one night and people prayed with him. He repeated the following night and the number of participants grew. The companions congregated the third and fourth night, but the Messenger did not show up. In the morning he told them, “I saw what you did last night, but nothing prevented me from joining you

except my fear that it might be made mandatory on you in Ramadan.”

This hadith is a clear indication that the *Taraweeh* congregation was not an innovation of 'Umar, the second Khalifah, despite his saying to the contrary. For it has been related that:

“Umar bin Al-Khattab attended the Masjid at night in Ramadan and saw people praying individually in every corner of the Masjid with a few in groups. He did not like the sight a bit. 'Umar said, ‘I thought it would be better to gather these under one Imam.’ So, he combined them under 'Obayi bin Ka'ab and Tamimu Ad-Dari to alternate and lead the believers in eleven raka'ats of night prayer. The next day 'Umar was in the Masjid which was full with Taraweeh prayers. He was delighted. He said: ‘Well, this is the best Bid'ah (innovation).’ ”

'Umar's use of the word *bid'ah* in this report has been presented and unjustifiably cited as justification for concocting up various so called good innovations. In truth, the Khalifah 'Umar's act to gather the believers in Jama'ah is not *bid'ah*. For it was the Messenger of Allah himself who started *jama'ah* by praying in congregation the first and second day, then stopped only as he feared it would become mandatory. After his death, the fear of Taraweeh becoming mandatory (Fard) was not only remote, it was impossible. With the death of the Prophet Muhammad (saas), there will be no more revelation to change any law or rule by abrogation.

Number of Raka'ats in Taraweeh

As for the number of raka'ats in Taraweeh and Witr, the worthy ancestor, *Salaf as-Saalih* disagreed on the amount of Raka'ats. These numbers are mentioned for raka'ats: 39, 29, 23, 19, 13,

and 11 raka'ats. Of all the numbers mentioned, none is sounder than 11 raka'ats. 'Aishah (raa) was asked how was the prayer of the Prophet (saas)? She replied:

“He did not pray in Ramadan or some other times more than eleven raka'ats.” (Muslim/Bukhari)

However, there is nothing wrong with praying more than 11 raka'ats. Perhaps that is why different numbers are observed. The Prophet himself was asked about night prayer and he said:

“It may be done in two raka'ats, and if anyone fears the appearance of morning, he should pray one rak'ah as a Witr for what he has already prayed.” (Bukhari/Muslim)

As this hadith indicates, if a person is to pray individually at night, by daybreak he would have prayed one hundred and one raka'ats, or more.

In their desire to pray more raka'ats, some people make Taraweeh in extreme speed. That is wrong, especially when the speed leads to a breach of certain rules of prayer. In that case, the prayer will not be valid. Similarly, it is undesirable for an Imam to pray with such speed whereby the followers will have difficulty observing the necessary deeds in Salaat.

Neglecting Taraweeh

No one should neglect Taraweeh without a good reason, for it is part of physical and spiritual training, for its observation soon after Iftar insures timely and proper digestion of food. Besides, there are spiritual rewards awaiting the observers of this prayer. No one would like to leave the Masjid before the prayer is over.

Everybody should attend the Masjid prayers, including women, provided they are properly covered. The Messenger of Allah said:

“Prevent not the women servants of Allah, from going to the Masjid of Allah.”

However, when they attend the Masjid they should wear no perfume, nor raise their voices, and or show their beauty. Allah (SWT) states:

“...they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof...”

(Al-Qur'an, 24:31)

What ordinarily appears, refers to the outer garments, for when the Messenger (saas) commanded women to attend Eid prayer, Umm 'Atiyah (raa) said:

“O Messenger of Allah, some of us do not have the outer garment (*jilbab*). The Messenger of Allah told her to let a sister (who has more than one) give her one to wear.”
(Agreed upon)

It is Sunnah that they pray behind the men in the rear lines. The Messenger has been reported as saying:

“The best lines for men are the front lines and the worst lines for men are the rear lines. The best lines for women is the rear and the worst lines of women are the front line. (Muslim)

The women should leave the Masjid as soon as the Imam says: *As-Salaamu 'Alaikum*. They should not delay without a valid reason. In a hadith by Umm Salamah, she said:

“When the Messenger of Allah (saas) saluted to end prayer, the women would stand up to leave and the Messenger would remain in his place for a while.”

Umm Salamah (raa) said: Allah is the best knower, but perhaps the Messenger did that so women would leave before men could overtake them.” (Bukhari)

The Wisdom behind Fasting

There are reasons and wisdom behind every single act in Islam, no matter how small. In time we may know the wisdom for behind some acts, and for others we may never know. *Salaat*, for instance, is a daily training for purifying the believer and reminding him that he is a member in a community of believers. Fasting, on the other hand, is an annual institution containing all conceivable attributes for human excellence. It is a training for the body and soul, a renewal of life, encouraging the spirit of sharing and giving. The following are some of the general benefits:

Self-Restraint (Taqwaa)

Allah (SWT) states:

“O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you that you may (learn) self restraint.”

(Al-Qur`an, 2:183)

This verse indicates the first lesson or wisdom to be gained in fasting, is self-restraint, (Taqwa) or the fear of Allah (SWT). That is to say, fasting instills in the heart the essence of consciousness of the Creator, moral courage both in secret and manifest, guiding the heart, the seat of emotion from spoilage and moral indecency.

It has been reported that Abdul Malik bin Al-Asma'e was in Makkah when Ramadan came, so he decided to leave for Taif to escape its heat. On the way, he met a Bedouin who told him that he was heading for Makkah. Abdul Malik asked him, “Aren't you afraid of Makkan heat in Ramadan?” The Bedouin replied, “It is from the heat (hellfire) I am running away.”

Fasting instills *taqwaa*, fear of Allah, and does so by controlling two aspects of the human body, which are the root causes of human downfall, namely the stomach and the private parts. The human body is constructed with the need to please the two of them and, in the process, man transgresses the rights of others, fellow human beings, and the commandments of Allah are violated. Fasting is equivalent to life, because with the level of *taqwaa* being raised, the person avoids the sins which are detrimental to life itself.

Behavior Modification

One of the most important things fasting affords the observer is helping him control or change his or her habits, the reason being human life is an embodiment of acquired habits. To change or control a habit is to wage a war on yourself. If *jihad* is mandatory on every believer because it is the peak of the essence in Islam, and it entails changing habits, the fasting is the training ground for the inevitable that will occur. The believer cannot wage a war and hope to defeat an enemy if he or she cannot wage war against his soul. Thus, the faster is admitted to the compulsory training opened only in Ramadan, the learning in this school is mandatory and succeeding or scoring high is mandatory, otherwise it is like you never entered. The Prophet (saas) said:

“Many a faster receives naught from his fast except the pain of hunger and thirst.”

If he scores high the reward is guaranteed:

“Three people's prayers are not rejected-among them - the faster, until he breaks.” (Ibn Hiban)

Now, does a Ramadan fast control one's habits? Simple, two of the most important habits are food and drink. An average person eats three meals a day, 21 meals a week. The way the fast is structured, with its basic and drastic alteration of eating habits, a faster takes light meals early in the morning and late in the evening. If the believer can control these two habits, food and drink, it will undoubtedly be easy for him to control other habits, including the habits of smoking, drug abuse and illicit sex. Do you not see that, if you can control your tongue, hands and all other parts of your body, it will be easy for you to apply the same training for the rest of the year.