

Heath Care

The benefits of fasting transcend guiding the faster from idle talk and indecent acts. It is a sentinel against disease, provided the faster follows the strict dietary rule: eat during fast breaking and avoiding over-eating. Allah (SWT) states:

“...Eat and drink, but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not wasters.”

(Al-Qur`an, 7:31)

A great deal of ailments originate from stomach indigestion. This is why the Messenger of Allah (saas) says:

“The son of Adam will never fill a container with something worse and evil than his stomach. It will suffice him some morsels (food) that will keep him on his feet, otherwise, he should divide his stomach into three parts: one third for his food, the other for his drink and the other third for his breath.” (Ibn Hibban)

This hadith indicates that the stomach is the origin of harmful bacteria. Even in the age of sophisticated machines, you can hardly find a machine so fragile but yet so remarkably durable and efficient like the stomach. This is the machine that receives food particles, processes and refines them, and distributes the products to different parts of the body. This is a lifelong operation. For the non-faster, the stomach will have no chance for rest. When the stomach is empty, as a result of fasting, it gets well-desired rest, to renew and rejuvenate its energy. With the fasting, the stomach is forced to go through a discharge whereby harmful residue are eliminated through perspiration as the body searches for food during fast.

During fast, the system of secretion is organized, and this in turn benefits the blood pressure, inhibiting hardening of the

arteries. The heart and kidney functions are enhanced as the work load tapers off. The fast helps to correct the problem of obesity and diabetes. Doctors over the years have used fasting as a prescription for certain ailments.

There was a discussion between Ali Bin Husain bin Waquid (raa) and a Christian physician to the Khalifah, Haroon Ar-Rasheed, about Islam's outlook on the science of medicine and health care. The physician said to Ibn Waquid: "There is not in your Book, *Al-Qur`an*, anything about medicine. For if *Al-Qur`an* is a book of science, what about this science?. Aren't there two kinds of sciences: the science of the body and the science of the soul?" Ibn Waquid responded: "Allah, the Most High has combined both sciences in half of a verse, when He states:

"...Eat and drink but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters."

(Al-Qur`an, 7:31)

The physician said: "Why, then, has nothing been mentioned about medicine from the mouth of your Messenger?" Ibn Waquid replied: "Our Messenger (saas), has combined the sciences about medicine in a few words when he says:

"The stomach is the house for disease and prevention is the essence of medicine."

The Christian physician then said: "Then your book, *Al-Qur`an*, and your Prophet Muhammad left nothing about medicine for Jalienas (a famous physician of the ancients)." (Arkanul Arba`ah by Abul Hasan Nadwi)

An American physician published a report on fasting and its benefits saying:

"It is mandatory on every person who is sick to restrain from food certain days in a year whether he be wealthy or poor because if bacteria can find food in abundance in the

body, it will grow and multiply. But with fasting it becomes weak.”

He then praised Islam. It should be considered as the wisest religion, for as it mandated fasting it has mandated health care. He continued:

“Indeed, Muhammad, who brought this religion, was the best physician who succeeded in his teachings, for he called for prevention before ailment, that is apparent in fasting and the nightly prayer (Taraweeh) that Muslims observe after fast breaking every day of Ramadan, for these physical acts contain big benefits in digesting food.” (Arkanul Arba`ah by Abul Hasan Nadwi)

Patience

Fasting helps in conditioning the heart, the soul, and the body on the virtues of patience, tenacity, and firmness in the face of adversity. Patience is the pinnacle of self-mastery, discipline and spiritual agility. Patience is to turn the phrase “I can't” into “I can.” It is to say, the difficult is easy. It is an inner and psychological demolition of things perceived by others as impossible. Fasting helps in all these shades for the virtuous, patient person because, the conditioning is that if a believer can exercise patience, and forsake gourmet food and drink, and the exhilaration we enjoy while eating or drinking our favorites, as well as marital association, the gratifying of other normal appetites for a whole day, for a month the realization that the barrier between you and food is your consciousness of your Creator, can better make you able to exercise patience in virtually everything in life.

Social Outlook

Socially, fasting is an expression of solidarity with the poor, the family and the whole society. This is a period in which the rich have first-hand experience of what it is to be poor, the pains the indigent suffers in normal living conditions. The process of disciplining resulting from Islamic fasting, instills in the rich the virtue of mercy, Rahmah, which is very important in terms of social well - being and proliferation of harmony. Allah bestows his mercy upon those who themselves are merciful to others.

“Those who are merciful to others, the Merciful will have mercy upon them,”

the Messenger said. He continued,

“Have mercy upon those on earth, and those in heaven will have mercy upon you.” (Abu Dawud/Tirmidhi)

Family Ties

Fasting strengthens family ties, especially in that the family is an endangered institution in western society. It helps the family gather together to break fast, at *Iftar*, and eat *sahuur* together at least twice a day for a month. The family even makes Salaat, together with the father as Imam.

Fasting enhances and energizes friendship, as Ramadan is known as the month of invitations and visitations. Friends, family members and neighbors extend invitations to each other to come to their homes to have Iftar together. The Messenger said,

“When a believer invites you, you should respond!”

Besides, Muslims gather together in the Masajid for *taraweeh* and *ta'aleem*.

Ramadan Believers

There are some Muslims who run away from all aspects of worship. They use all their energies, not for good deeds, but living a worldly life empty of faith. But come Ramadan, they will head home to Allah for repentance. They will become active again in prayer and fasting, and they will frequent the masjid. But no sooner are Ramadan and Eid over, that they return to their old habits, living on the edge again, putting on the garment of disbelief. These people should know Allah is not alive only in Ramadan. If they worship Allah only in Ramadan, it would be better for them just to stop worshipping altogether, because, as we mentioned earlier, if Ramadan does not benefit you the rest of the year, it is as if you did not have Ramadan at all.

Comparison between the Fasting in Islam and Other Religions

Al-Islam, has taken the lead in reforming the institution of fasting. This was a radical reform in the meaning, rules and purpose of the fast. It made the fast easy, natural and effective. The following are some of the points in this regard:

1. Fasting was a symbol of sadness, mourning, atonement for the sins, a reminder of disasters as well as self - mortification in Judaism and Christianity. Islam radicalized this doom and gloom concept of fasting, into an enlightened concept of triumph over the forces of evil. The month of fasting in Islam is a month of worship Muslims welcome each year with energy and happiness, and are saddened only when the month departs. This is contrary to the atmosphere of mourning. Fasting is for the living.

2. Fasting is not self-denial and punishment of the body and soul, a belief that was wide-spread among the medieval European ascetics. Indeed, there is not such a thing in Islam, nor in *Al-Qur`an* or the Sunnah. The laws that govern the institution are not extremely unbearable, the restrictions are not enforced 24 hours every day. The tradition of sahuur is a perfect example. The faster is allowed to delay and eat *sahuur* until he or she is certain that there are just a few minutes before morning prayer. Similarly, when it is time to break fast, the rule is to break as soon as the sun sets, with no delay. Besides, sleeping and resting during the day are all allowed. Working is not stopped and businesses are not closed down for the fast. In Judaism, working during the period of fast is prohibited. Allah (SWT) said:

“...Allah intends every facility for you. He does not want to put you to difficulties...”

(Al-Qur`an, 2:185)

3. Fasting was for special classes of people in the previous religions. For the Brahmin class in the Hindu religion, fasting is mandatory only for the high priests. In the some Latin religions, it is only women who must fast and there are no exceptions.

4. In Judaism, the faster eats only after the break and there is no more food. The Arabs, before Islam, would not eat after sleeping. Islam, on the other hand, threw away all these human imposed restrictions. Allah said:

“...And eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from it's black thread...”

(Al-Qur`an, 2:187)

The person who makes a mistake in fasting is not punished, and the one who forgets and eats is forgiven.

5. Fasting in some other religions is based on a solar calendar, like the Gregorian calendar. This demands vast knowledge of calculation and astronomy in the making of a calendar. Besides, the months are fixed in a specific season, they do not rotate or change. Fasting in Islam is based on the lunar calendar and is tied to the sightings of *hilal*, the crescent, or new moon. Allah (SWT) states:

“They ask you concerning the new moons. Say: They are but signs to mark fixed periods of time....”

(Al-Qur`an, 2:189)

And the hadith:

“Eat until you see the crescent and break not until you see the crescent. If it is cloudy calculate the period of the month.” (Muslim and others)

This enables Muslims in every corner of the earth, east and west, north and south, and all in between, in remote villages, on mountains, in conditions of illiteracy or literacy, in jungles or deserts to start and end the fast all at the same time, without difficulty.

Why the moon instead of the sun as the basis for starting and ending fast? There are several reasons:

The lunar year is about ten or eleven days less compared to the Gregorian. Thus, if Ramadan 1990 began on March 27th, Ramadan in 1991 would begin around March 16th. Consequently, in the course of 36 years, every Muslim would have fasted every day of the year, the short days of the year, the long days of the year, the hot days and the cold days of the year. Muslims in different regions of the world would have had total equality in the number of days they fasted, and would have had an equal amount of seasonal and climatic changes. They would have an equal amount of cold or mild weather Ramadans.

If the fast were based on the Gregorian calendar, the Muslims in hot summer climates would have Ramadan during hot weather every year, forever. Some Muslims would have fasted long days while others short days, because Gregorian calendar months are fixed and immobile.

There is another interesting reason; fruits, vegetables for using the lunar calendar and some food items come in certain seasons. Fasting based on the lunar system means we may miss certain fruits in certain seasons, but by the end of the circle a Muslim would have tasted and tried different fruits during Ramadan, whereas fasting based on the Gregorian calendar would have prohibited some fruits during Ramadan, forever. This is why Muslims did not change the month of Ramadan, nor did they distort it by increasing or decreasing days, nor did they change it to different months.