

most important device to test the *Iman*, faith, of the believer and the depth of his sincerity and commitment to the concept of *Tauheed*, the Oneness of Allah.

The hadith also states that fasting is a shield, an armor protecting the believer from sinful acts (*ma'asi*). Do you not know that nourishment is the first culprit in the propagation of sins? For when you eat, the blood flow increases considerably, and the energy level increases, making it easier for Satan to use your own energy level to tempt you to commit sins. In another hadith, the Prophet states:

“Satan runs in the circulatory system of the son of Adam in the same way blood circulates in our system; so tighten his passages with hunger.” (Bukhari/Muslim)

Now you see why fasting becomes a shield. Fasting enables the believer to guard against his archenemy. It also helps him against human evil by putting the patience and perseverance gained from fasting into use with forbearance and forgiveness of the attacker - that is, of course, when the safety of ones life is not involved. Otherwise, in this case, Al-Qur'an allows the believer to repel evil without transgression.

Bad Breath

The above Hadith also gives the faster good news regarding the changing breath of the faster, which is sweeter to Allah (SWT) than musk. The changing breath of the mouth is a vivid physical testimony of this discipline. As much as we hate bad breath, in fasting it is a good thing, for it is caused by the coating which appears on the upper surface of the tongue soon after the commencement of the fast. After desiring food, the body begins to digest such waste material and deposits of fat as are available to it. This coating on the tongue is an outward proof that inner elimination is in progress. As soon as the digestive organs have been purified, the mouth returns to normal.

In a hadith related by Abdullah Bin Omar, the Prophet said:

“Fasting (Siyaam) and the Book of Allah (Al-Qur'an) will intercede for the servant on the Day of Judgment. The fasting will say: ‘O, Allah, I denied him nourishment and sex during the daytime. Let me intercede on his behalf’, and Al-Qur'an will say: ‘I denied him sleep during night time; so let me intercede on his behalf.’ So Allah will allow them to intercede on his behalf.” (Ahmed)

This hadith indicates on the Day of Judgment, when the events will be overwhelming and the outcome uncertain, the fast and the Book will intercede for the servants of Allah. As every second of daytime devotion and every letter of Al-Qur'an voices their pleasure openly with you during the witnessing and interviewing, bear in mind that *Shafa'ah* (intercession), is an extreme privilege and a rare commodity. Even the average prophet will not attempt to intercede for anyone on this day.

Shal bin Sa'ad reported the Messenger of Allah (saas) said:

“Paradise (*Jannah*) has a door called *Rayyan* (the quencher), which is preserved for those who observed fasting on the Day of Judgment. It will be announced, ‘Where are those who observed fasting?’ The door, *Rayyan*, will not be closed until the last one of them enters.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

This is what the pleasure of Allah is all about. The person who observes fasting becomes an elite in the hour that every other person is busy turning the pages of their books of deeds. This is the time you are pulled away through the *Rayyan* Gate to Paradise.

Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudree related the Messenger of Allah (saas) said:

“If a servant of Allah fasts a day for the pleasure of Allah (SWT), He will distance his face from the hellfire, in the equivalent of that day, which, in the sight of Allah, will take seventy years to cover.” (Bukhari/Muslim)

The Hereafter is real, and rewarding evil in kind is also real; but as a reward to those who observe the fast, Allah (SWT) will distance them from the ultimate punishment. These four reports underscore the spiritual as well as the physical value of Siyaam, fasting.

Kinds of Fasting

Fasting is divided into two kinds: Fard, the obligatory fast, and Tatau'u, any non-obligatory fast. The obligatory fast is categorized as three kinds:

- (1) fasting the month of Ramadan
- (2) fasting to expiate for religious offenses
- (3) fasting to fulfill a vow

Of the three, fasting the month of Ramadan is the most important; so we will devote most of the discussion to it in our book.

Fasting the Month of Ramadan - *Sawm Ramadan*

When we speak of Ramadan, we speak of an annual spiritual event so serious that it impressively engulfs the entire Muslim Ummah in a religious season surpassing any annual event in the world.

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, Al-Hijrah. This calendar is based on the lunar system. There are twelve months in the lunar year. They are:

1. Al Muharram
2. Safar
3. Rabee'ul Awwal
4. Rabee'ul Athathanee
5. Jumadah Awwal
6. Jumadth Thanee
7. Rajab
8. Sha'aban
9. Ramadan
10. Shawwal
11. Dhul-Qidah
12. Dhul-Hijah

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is derived from the Arabic root word *ramida* or *ar-ramad* denoting intense scorching heat and dryness, especially the ground. From the same root there is *ramdaa*, sunbaked sand, and the famous proverb: ***“Kal Mustajeer minar Ramadaa binnar”*** - to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. And in a hadith the Messenger of Allah (saas) said:

“The prayer of repenters is due when the young camel can feel the sun's heat early in the morning.” (Muslim)

Thus, the word Ramadan is so called to indicate the heating sensation in the stomach as a result of thirst). Others said it is so called because Ramadan scorches out the sins with good deeds, as the sun burns the ground. Some said it is so called because the hearts and souls are more readily receptive to the admonition and remembrance of Allah during Ramadan, as the sand and stones are receptive to the sun's heat. The framers of this beautiful language may have been inspired by Allah (SWT) in naming this month Ramadan. Otherwise, the relation between the heat and its properties is miraculously similar to that of Ramadan. While the heat represents the matter that helps shape, form, and mold virtually every matter - from metal and plastics, to plants and living cells - Ramadan undoubtedly helps a serious believer remold, reshape, reform, and renew his physical and spiritual disposition and behavior.

Legal Status of Ramadan

The observation of Ramadan is mandated by two Islamic sources, Al-Qur'an and Sunnah, along with *Ijmaa*, the consensus of the scholars. Al-Qur'an states:

“O, you who believe fasting is prescribed to you, as it was prescribed to those before you that you may acquire self-restraint.”

(Al Qur'an 2:183)

The proof in this citing is very obvious, for whenever Allah (SWT) uses the word *kutiba*, which means, among other things, prescribed or written, it indicates the action that follows it becomes mandatory upon the believers, men and women. After establishing *Sawm*, the verse emphasized that this was not the first time the obligation of fasting had been established, for it stated that previous nations received the same mandate. We are not certain about the time, date, and amount.

Many scholars state the introductory clause *kamaa* implies and refers to the analogy between our fasting today and the fasting of previous people. There are similarities in the time and amount, but what happened to Ramadan is that the high priests, before the time of Prophet Muhammad (saas) added more days than were prescribed for them. It became difficult and they could not do it, so they moved the date to spring until they neglected it altogether.

In a hadith it is reported by Daghfal Imam Hanzalah (raa) that the Messenger of Allah (saas) said:

“The Christians used to fast one month. So when a man fell ill amongst them, they vowed if Allah cured him, they would increase ten more days to their fasting. He was cured, and the fast became *forty days*. Then another

man ate meat; his mouth pained him. They vowed again if Allah cured him, they would add seven more days. He was cured and the fast increased to *forty-seven days*.

Then a king fell ill. They vowed again if Allah cured him, they would complete seven to ten days and move their fast to the spring. The king was cured and the fast increased to *fifty days*.” (Tafseer Al-Qurtabi)

This is how the pillar of religion was neglected. Even some Christian writer complained,

“For nearly a century and a half, fasting has been out of vogue, at least in the churches of the West. The very idea of someone actually fasting today seems strange to most twentieth century Christians. They associate it with medieval Christianity.” (Fasting a Neglected Discipline)

Some said the analogy is referring to the manner of fasting - restraint from food and drink and marital relations. The verse ends with a strong hint to the spiritual benefit of fasting:

“That ye may acquire self-restraint.”

The word used is *tataqun*. It is originally from *waga*, to protect, the same base word used for fear of Allah, *taqwa*; for when you fear Allah, you protect yourself against His wrath and against things that will destroy yourself.

Taqwa (fear of Allah), is easily achieved with fasting for the simple reason that, when you fast, you become weak for the lack of nourishment, which means your cravings are diminished. With diminished cravings, the sins are greatly lessened, because there is no energy to fuel them, praise be to Allah. When sin is lessened, the barometer for *taqwah* rises.

Elsewhere Allah (SWT) states:

“Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Qur'an as a guide to humanity and as a clear

sign for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So anyone of you who witnesses the month should spend it in fasting...”

(Al-Qur'an, 2:185)

This verse contains important rules and reasons for fasting that will be explained later. However, what concerns us here is the statement,

“So anyone of you who witnesses the month should spend it in fasting.”

There are exceptions, like when traveling, which will be explained later.

The above examples have been the proof from in Al-Qur'an. As for the proof from hadith, there are many, amongst them a hadith reported by Bukhari and Muslim in which the Messenger (saas) states:

“Islam is built on five (pillars), testimony that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, and testimony that Muhammad is His messenger, establishing Salat, giving Zakaat, observing the fast of Ramadan, and pilgrimage to the House of Allah.” (Bukhari/Muslim)

The hadith established fasting during the month of Ramadan as one of the pillars on which this religion is built. This hadith reinforces the obligation of fasting as stated in Al-Qur'an. We will see later that there are other Hadiths that explain in detail how to observe the *'Ebadah*, the worship of fasting.

Because of this collection of proofs from both Al-Qur'an and the Sunnah, the Muslim scholars agreed in *Ijima'a* that abstinence from physical nourishment and sex associated with intention to seek Allah's pleasure is mandatory upon every believer. Before verse (2:185) was revealed, Muslims were commanded to fast three days in every month (verse 2:183). This

verse (2:185) was revealed on Monday, Sha'aban 2, in the second year of Hijrah, thus, abrogating the earlier order.