

Reaping the benefits of Ramadhan

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In the month of Ramadaan it is very important that we spent a few moments to understand some of the wisdoms and lessons that we can learn from this month of fasting.

Unfortunately, many Muslims come in to this month and they are as a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Let it not be that the day that you fast and the day that you break fast be equal." Meaning, one's behaviour, attitude and outlook are the same whether one fasts or not, i.e. fasting has no effect upon that person. This is why we need to reflect on some of these lessons.

LESSON 1: Gaining Taqwaa

Allaah legislated fasting for gaining taqwaa, "O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed upon you as it has been prescribed upon those before you, so that you may attain taqwaa." (meaning of Soraatul Baqarah (2):183) Taqwaa in this case means to make a shield between oneself and Allaah's anger and Hellfire. So we should ask ourselves, when we break our fasts, 'Has this fasting day made us fear Allaah more? Has it resulted that we want to protect ourselves from the hellfire or not?

LESSON 2: Drawing closer to Allaah

This is achieved by reciting and reflecting on Al-Qur'aan during night and day, attending the taraaweeh prayers, remembering Allaah, sitting in circles of knowledge and, for those who can, making `umrah. Also for those who can, making Tikaaf (seclusion) in the last ten nights of Ramadaan, so as to leave all worldly pursuits and seclude oneself in a masjid just thinking of Allaah, so as to bring oneself closer to Allaah (SWT). When one sins, one feels distant from Allaah. That is why one might find it hard to read the Qur'aan and come to the masjid. However, the obedient worshipper feels closer to Allaah and wants to worship Allaah more, because he is not shy from his sins.

LESSON 3: Acquiring patience and strong will

Allaah has mentioned patience more than seventy times in the Qur'aan and has commanded patience in more than sixteen ways in His Book. So when one fasts, and gives up one's food and drink, and one's marital sexual relations for those hours, one learns restraint and patience. This Ummah needs man and

women that are strong willed, who can stand upon the Sunnah and the Book of Allah and not waver in front of the enemies of Allaah. We do not need emotional people, who just raise slogans and shout, but when the time comes to stand upon something firm, they cannot do so, they waver.

LESSON 4: Striving for Ihsaan (righteousness and sincerity) and staying away from riyaa' (showing off)

Ihsaan means to worship Allaah as if one seeks Him, and even though one does not see Him, He sees all. Hasan al-Basree said, "By Allaah, in the last twenty years, I have not said a word or taken something with my hand or refrained to take something with my hand or stepped forth or stepped back, except that I have thought before I have done any action, 'Does Allaah love this action? Is Allaah pleased with this action?' So when one is fasting, one should gain this quality of watching oneself and also staying away from riyaa' (showing off). That is why Allah said in a hadeeth qudsi, "Fasting is for Me and I reward it." (al-Bukhaaree) Allaah singles out fasting from all other types of worship saying, "Fasting is for Me", because no one knows whether you are fasting or not, except Allaah. For example, when one is praying or giving charity or making tawaaaf, one can be seen by the people, so one might do the action seeking the praise of the people. Sufyaan ath-Thawree used to spend the nights and the days crying and the people used to ask him, "Why do you cry, is it due to the fear of Allaah? He said, 'No.' They said, "Is it due to the fear of the Hellfire?" He said, 'No. It is not the fear of Hellfire that makes me cry, what makes me cry is that I have been worshipping Allaah all these years and doing scholarly teaching, and I am not certain that my intentions are purely for Allaah.'"

LESSON 5: Refinement of manners, especially those related to truthfulness and discharging trusts.

The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) said, "Whoever does not abandon falsehood in word and action, then Allaah (SWT) has no need that he should heave his food and drink." (al-Bukhaaree) What we learn from this, is that we must pay attention to the purification of our manners.

The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) said, "was sent to perfect good manners." (Maalik) So we must check ourselves, are we following the behaviour of the Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him)? For example: Do we give salaam to those we don't know and those we do know? Do we follow the manners of Islaam, by telling the truth and only telling the truth? Are we sincere? Are we merciful to the creation?

LESSON 6: Recognizing that one can change for the better

The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) said, "Every son of Adam sins and the best of the sinners are those who repent." (Ibn Maajah) Allaah provides many opportunities to repent to Him and seek His forgiveness. If one was disobedient they can become obedient.

LESSON 7: Being more charitable

Ibn `Abaas said, "The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) was the most charitable amongst the people, and he used to be more so in the month of Ramadaan when Jibreel used to meet him on every night of Ramadaan till the end of the month..." (al-Bukhaaree) The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) said, "He who gives food for a fasting person to break his fast, he will receive the same reward as him, without nothing being reduced from the fasting person's reward." (at-Tirmidhee)

LESSON 8: Sensing the unity of the Muslims

The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) said, "...Those of you who will live after me will see many differences. Then you must cling to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided khaleefahs. Hold fast to it and stick to it." (Aboo Daawood) In this month we sense that there is a possibility for unity, because we all fast together, we break fast together, we all worship Allah together, and we pray Salaatul-`Eid together. Therefore we sense that the unity of possible. It is possible for Muslims to be a single body, but this will only be achieved when obedience is only to Allaah and His Messenger.

LESSON 9: Learning discipline

The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) made us adhere to discipline and strictness, strictness that does not lead to fanaticism or going outside the bounds that Allaah has laid down. One cannot knowingly break the fast before the sunset, as this will not be accepted by Allaah. Muslims should learn to be very strict in their lives, because they are people of an important message, which they mold their lives around.

LESSON 10: Teaching the young to worship Allaah

It was the practice of the people of Madeenah, that during the fast of `Aashooraa (which is now a recommended fast of one day) to get their children to fast with them. When the children would cry of hunger and thirst, their parents would distract their attention by giving them some sort of toy to

play with. The children would break their fast with their parents. (as mentioned in al-Bukhaaree).

So the young should be brought to the masjid and they should pray with their parents, so that they are able to get into the habit of becoming worshippers of Allaah. If one does not encourage children to fast when they are young, they will find it very difficult to fast for thirty days at the age of puberty. This is why the Prophet (may Allah send His blessing and peace upon him) said, "Command your children to pray at the age of seven and beat them at the age of ten (if they do not pray)." (Haakim)

LESSON 11: Caring for one's health

Fasting has many medical benefits and it teaches Muslims to take care of their health and too build strong bodies. The Prophet (may Allaah send His blessing and peace upon him) said, "A strong believer is better and is more beloved to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in everyone." (Muslim)