

RAMADAN

Month of Salvation



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INTRODUCTION

Every year, in every part of the world, a remarkable event brings life to a dramatic change. The normal patterns of waking up in the morning to prepare for work are disrupted. The work continues with the customary pace, but coffee and lunch breaks are not spent in the usual way. At sunset, all members of the family are sharing food and thoughts like no other days of the year. Indeed, part of the night is not even spent at home. Long and many rows of people bowing and prostrating can be found wherever the eyes travel. Over a billion people experience this notable event, living in just about every country of the world. The event is termed Ramadan and in this brief we take a quick journey to understanding exactly what this is and why it forms the salvation that we all desire.

WHAT IS RAMADAN?

Ramadan is the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The Islamic year is initiated by the journey made by the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) and his companion Abu Bakir Siddique (may God be please him) from the city of Mecca to Madina. The year has 12 lunar months. Each month can have either 29 or 30 days, depending on the birth of a new moon. Indeed, Ramadan begins and ends (like the other eleven months) on the sighting of the new moon.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RAMADAN?

The month on its own does not merit anything special. However, God Almighty in the last scripture given to society and known as the Holy Quran has said:

Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong).

The Holy Quran 2:185

The importance of Ramadan is the fact that the Holy Quran was revealed to the world during this month. Since this is a weighty and momentous occurrence, as the Holy Quran determines what is right

and what is wrong, the complete month is valued, honoured and respected.

WHY DO PEOPLE FAST DURING RAMADAN?

To celebrate the fact that God Almighty as the Creator has given guidance for us to live happily on earth, we are instructed to fast. The Holy Quran says:

So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month (Ramadan) should spend it in fasting.

The Holy Quran 2:185

WHY IS FASTING SEEN AS A CELEBRATION?

The purpose of divine scriptures is to bring people closer to God Almighty. Every action, whether helping someone cross the road or providing shelter to the homeless, takes a person closer to God Almighty. To celebrate we must, therefore, do what takes us nearer to our Lord. Fasting is a unique effort where we abstain from our everyday activities to be grateful and thankful to God Almighty. This means that during the whole month, we do everything possible to please our Lord. This can take the form of doing more good and acceptable actions, and less of those behaviours and patterns which may harm others or us in the society. What better celebration than the one that takes a person nearer to his Creator?

IS FASTING UNIQUE TO RAMADAN?

Fasting most definitely is not unique to Ramadan. Our God has instructed us to fast throughout history. Whether we look at Prophet Abraham, or Prophet David, or Prophet Moses, or Prophet Jesus, or Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings be upon on them), the story is the same. In fact, the mother of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), Mary (may God be pleased with her), found solitude and spiritual fulfilment through fasting. This fact is reflected in the Holy Quran, where our Lord says:

O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) God awareness.

The Holy Quran 2:183

So, we see that fasting is a noble act that mirrors saintly people before us, who through their love for God Almighty sacrificed some element of their life.

HOW DOES A PERSON FAST DURING RAMADAN?

The way a person fasts during the month of Ramadan is similar to fasting in any other part of the year. A fast lasts from dawn to dusk. During this period, a person who fasts needs to make added effort to increase actions which are deemed by our Creator as good and avoid all conduct and behaviour that contradicts the instructions provided by our Lord. Without such an effort, the full benefit of fasting is negated and the pleasure of our Creator drifts from a person who does not celebrate the month of Ramadan. The daily routine includes taking some food before dawn, known as Suhoor, and then opening the fast after sunset with some food, referred to as Iftaar. Since the purpose of fasting is to bring a person closer to God Almighty and to be thankful to Him, during the nights of Ramadan special prayers are said.

WHAT SHOULD A FASTING PERSON AVOID?

There are a number of items that a person who fasts should avoid. These include the following:

- Deliberate eating of food or drinking of liquids.
- Sexual conduct of any kind.
- Intentional vomiting.
- Loose talk and behaviour.
- Injections containing nourishments.

WHO SHOULD NOT FAST?

The act of fasting is aimed at individuals who are healthy and are in a position to perform this virtue without harming themselves or others. Fasting thus is not recommended for the following group of people:

- The very weak and frail.
- The very young.
- The very old.
- Those who are chronically ill.
- Women who are pregnant.
- Women who are breastfeeding.
- Women who are in state of menstruation.
- Those who making a significant journey.
- A person who is diagnosed as insane.

In some cases, a person who does not fast in the month of Ramadan needs to compensate for this loss. This can be in the form of offering a financial contribution to others to help them open theirs fasts, or fasting outside the month of Ramadan to make-up for the number of loss days.

WHAT IS LAILAT-UL-QADR?

The revelation of divine guidance in the form of the Holy Quran took place during a special night. This night is referred to as Lailat-ul-Qadr and its literal meaning is 'The Night of Power'. God Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

Verily! We have sent it (the Holy Quran) down in the Night of Power (Lailat-ul-Qadr). And what will make you know what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months...

The Holy Quran 97:1-3

The reference to a thousand months points to a life of a person. It reflects the fact that worship during this special Night has a value

greater than that of a person spending their whole life in submission and obedience to the Creator.

WHEN DOES LAILAT-UL-QADR OCCUR?

Since the Holy Quran was revealed in the month of Ramadan, the Night of Power can therefore also be found in this month. According to the tradition of the last Messenger of God, Mohammed (peace be upon him), Lailat-ul-Qadr is resident in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan. Since the night comes before the day, this means it can be found after fasting the 20th, 22nd, 24th, 26th, and 28th day of the month. People throughout the world make extra effort to seek this Night. Some even fast during the last ten days of Ramadan and keep awake in worship during these nights to ensure that they do not miss the blessings of the Night of Power.

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION?

We attain salvation when our Creator is pleased with us. This can only happen when we fully submit ourselves to follow the divine Will. By doing so, we are simply honouring our role in life and that of a servant to an all-powerful and all-forgiving Master. The month of Ramadan gives every person an opportunity to seek the pleasure of his or her Lord and therefore it provides an ideal vehicle for acquiring the most desirable wish, salvation on the Day of Judgement.

AND FINALLY...

For information about Ramadan and fasting, and indeed any aspects of the Muslim way of life, please feel free to contact us:

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