

Perhaps it may be our last Ramadan!

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Abstract: *The month of Ramadan allows one to practice patience, tolerance and Taqwa. It teaches abstinence from "Munkar", nourishes the soul through "Maruf", increases spirituality and will-power, cleanses the heart and brings unity within our surroundings. It is imperative that Muslims invest for understanding this Talim, reflect upon the purpose of their existence and take cognizance of their deeds. Sadly, people who offer Salaat punctually and keep Sawm think that they are fulfilling demands of the religion but often ignore Muamlat (dealings or transactions) on which Qur'an and Saheb al Qur'an have emphasized.*

1. A Few Possible Ramadan activities:

1. Clean your home, especially the place you offer Salaat.
2. Wash and perfume (non-alcoholic) your Şalaat clothes and Sajadah (Salaat rug).
3. Reserve one particular space in your home for Şalaat, even though it might be small.
4. Store your Şalaat clothes, Salaat mat, Qur'an, Majmua of Adiy'at (singular: Dua) in this place, and repent before Allah so that this place will bear Shahadah of your Ibadah on the day of Qayamah.
5. Have a labelled "Ramadan Savings Box" and every day put whatever amount in it you can with the intention of spending it on clothing and feeding orphans and the needy prior to the day of Eid al-Fitr.
6. A noble act that can be done during Shahrullah al-Muazzam (Ramadan) is sharing ift'ar with an under-privileged family every day.
7. If there is any particular Surah from Qur'an that you frequently recite, then promise Allah for the Hifdh of that particular Surah in this Mubarak month with the firm Niyah of understanding it.
8. Doing istaghfar and Taubah on sins which deprives one from different Naimah like children, Haj, Ziyarah of "Al Atab'at al-Aaliyy'at" (shrines of Ahl al-Bayt), Nikah, health,

Rizq and many other blessings of Allah. This month is one of the best times for acceptance of Taubah.

9. Include your nearest and dearest in your daily Dua, and also ask them to remember you in their Dua. In sha Allah you will feel the benefit of this act.
10. Recite Qur'an and try to understand the meanings of its words as much as you can. Reading the Qur'an without understanding is akin to reading like a parrot which makes no sense. This Qur'an has been gifted to us to read and understand and then practice accordingly. Otherwise it doesn't make sense.

2. Avoid Munkar

The month of Ramadan is similar to a divine spring when blessings from Allah instill a new spirit in the believers who eagerly await its advent. Ramadan is the time to practice the true concept of Taqwa (fear of Allah). It is the month of purification and salvation, but there are some who even in this month are largely involved in activities which are condemned by the Shariah, such as:

- i). Food festivals in the name of ift'ar dinners
- ii). Khuraf'at of TV, Whatsapp or Facebook
- iii). Window shopping in markets just for fun after ift'ar
- iv). Playing and pleasure seeking activities instead of Ibadah.

The above mentioned acts of Munkar are causes of destruction and destroy piety. Many people spend money in the name of charity in Ramadan on public platforms for self-glorification which destroys its religious significance. Hadith Literature provides guidance that charity should be offered in the same manner as you would've liked receiving from others had you been in that position i.e. in an honorable way. Moreover, Ramadan is meant to impart lessons of tolerance and patience so we can act on it throughout the year with sympathy for the under privileged.

3. Ramadan, a period of collection for the long journey:

People approach Ramadan in different ways. Its perception differs from people to people. Some view Ramadan as a period of expressing their undying love for Allah. For them, Ramadan is a valuable, precious, and rare occasion. They spend all their time doing good, convinced that the reward of each act is multiplied. For them, patience, sympathy, and generosity beautify the character. They guard their tongues and remain preoccupied in recitation of the Qur'an and Dua, seeking Taubah, requesting protection from Jahannam and pleading for Jannah. However, there are others who regard Ramadan as a painstaking task. It is a painful practice and a torturous month for them. They reluctantly keep Sawm and offer Salaat. Their concept of Siy'am is limited to physical abstinence from food, drink, and intimacy with their spouse. They spend their time chatting, watching TV, and wasting their nights in markets and restaurants. They are not inclined towards Khair'at, nor are they careful of their Ibadah. Their goal in Ramadan is to prepare for Eid. The following Hadith suitably describes their spiritless actions:

"Many are the ones who keep Sawm attaining nothing except hunger, and many perform Salaat by night attaining nothing except the discomfort of staying awake."

Yet a third group is hardly ever moved by Ramadan. They don't believe in Ibadah and remain busy in their worldly activities. They are not concerned with religion, and have neither the will nor time to change their daily routines, as per injunctions of the Shariah. The following Hadith should serve as a harsh warning to them:

"Jibra'el (as) appeared before me and said: "Woe to him who found the blessed month of Ramadan and let it pass by without gaining forgiveness." "Upon that I said: Aameen".

4. A blessed month of training:

Ramadan is a school, which after completion of a month's course, gives result to each believer. Ramadan is a sacred training school where a believer learns how to recharge their spiritual batteries to gain provision for Akhirah. If one cannot attain advantage from this month then when will he? This is the month for renewing our Aqidah, strengthening our willpower, and seeking Taubah; a unique opportunity to fortify the bond of love with our Creator through Ibadah Zahirah and Aam'al Batinah. Salaat and Zakaat are inter-connected and linked to the category of Ibadah Zahirah. Instructions have been given that Faraid should be performed openly so that others might be inclined towards it. Khair'at is under the head of Aam'al Batinah which has direct link to Allah alone.

It is a noted fact that after each Ramadan many indulge in immoral, shameless and indecent activities during Eid holidays which Shariah condemns. People revert to entertainment in the form of music, forbidden films etc. and spend on gambling, drinking, and profligacy, and consider it part of celebrating Eid. Involvement of Muslims in such nefarious activities is the major cause of humiliation and fall of the Muslim power worldwide. Ramadan ends with Eid al Fitr but the deeds and actions displayed during Ramadan should serve as a facilitator which should be followed throughout the year.

Divine help shall not reach the corrupt by nature. Rahmah is not conferred upon those who only take the name of Allah and disregard true actions. Islam is a religion of qualities, not faces or personalities. It has no concern with any community or locality but it is universal and for all times. Instead of improving our character, we are happy with our own brand of Islam. The teachings of Islam have become so contaminated with foreign customs and un-Islamic ideologies that a Muslim convert has to make an effort to search for the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah of Islam or else he/she would remain confused and ignorant. Some time back a senior diplomat who converted to Islam a few months ago contacted me and requested that I suggest an authentic book of Muslim Customs & Traditions. I advised him that it is better to perform the Faraid of Islam and not to occupy himself with customs since they are not part of the religion.

Know that Ramadan is an appearance of blessings and can be a turning point in an individual's life; an opportunity of transformation towards an improved mode of life, and a change from the disgrace of sins to the beauty of submission. We should not lose the blessings of Ramadan by falling back on our previous careless ways. Take hold of this blessing which gives a new shape to life, and become worthy of being called a Muslim.

5. Dua for each Muslim:

May Allah grant us inspiration, strength and spirit to make this Ramadan a starting point towards a new phase of our life.

May He grant us the ability to abide by Shariah. May Allah allow us this opportunity to utilize our time in a positive and constructive manner for His pleasure.

Perhaps it may be our last Ramadan, our last opportunity to benefit from the special blessings and forgiveness that accompanies this month, for who knows whether we may be there to receive the blessings next year or not. On the following Dua of Al Imam Ali ibn al-Husain (as), better known as "Zayn ul-Abideen," in a form of farewell Salaam I close this discussion:

"Salaam be upon you (O month of Ramadan), a month which embodies the spirit of Salaam. Salaam be upon you whose companionship is not disliked, you whose friendly mixing is not blamed! Salaam be upon you, just as you have entered upon us with blessings."

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