

I. The Spirit of Ramadan



Ramadan – the month of fasting, is a special and blessed month for Muslims. It was in this month that revelations of the Quran began to be made to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, marking the commencement of Prophethood.

Ramadan is a month of restraint and worship; of caring and thanksgiving; of repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of Ramadan inspired the Prophet to exclaim: “Welcome to the one who purifies!”

Ramadan is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavour to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings.

The main aim of fasting is to weaken a man’s dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ divided the month of Ramadan into three parts. He called the first ten days, “Blessings”, the next ten days, “Forgiveness” and the last ten days, “Freedom from hell-fire”. The Prophet also said, “The best days of this world are the last ten days (of Ramadan).”

One who fasts in all sincerity takes care to cast his entire life in one consistent mould. In all his affairs, he follows the constraints laid down by Allah and refrains from doing, saying or even thinking anything that is prohibited by Him. He indulges neither in persecution nor in any kind of injustice. The Prophet warned, “Allah does not need the fast of one who does not leave off falsity in speaking or who acts according to his or her false assertions.”

9. Generating an Environment of Moral Rectification

During Ramadan a dramatic change comes over the Islamic community. Believers are seen sitting inside masjids, reciting the Quran, immersed in prayer (*dua*) and remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*). They become more detached and contemplative. Their boisterous and frivolous urges are curbed.

Man is a social being: he is either encouraged or depressed by his surroundings.

This sea change in communal life during Ramadan therefore affects the individual believer. He is encouraged by the change in his brethren and inclines more and more towards Allah. Believers turn away from common vices – the drinking of alcohol lessens, instances of theft are reduced, and even television is shunned. Peace and tranquility reign in the neighbourhoods and even in market places.

All these changes create a good environment for moral rectification. The bad become less so and the good become better.

The shared experience of Ramadan reinforces the feeling of brotherhood. The believers try to give more in charity and become more considerate of their fellow beings. Communal *iftars* are organized, and people provide for *iftar* meals inside mosques for travelers, the indigent and those unable to reach home in time. Many also try to take time off from work to devote more time to prayer.

The month-long course of piety and devotion is designed to drill us in adopting the correct Islamic attitude and practice. This course should enable us to maintain the highest moral standards till the next Ramadan.

Believers also reach out to their families and relatives who may be living far away. Greetings are exchanged, invitations extended for *iftars* and the blessings of Allah invoked for each other.



13. Special Night Prayers — *Tarawih*

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once said,

“Whoever prayed at night, the whole month of Ramadan, out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from God, will have all of his previous wrong actions forgiven.”

The special night prayers during Ramadan are called *tarawih*. They are performed after the obligatory Isha prayer and can be offered right throughout the night but preferably before the Witr prayer, the last prayer of the night. The practice of offering *tarawih* prayers was not common during the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Over time the practice became established.



A *bafiz* (one who has memorised the Quran from start to finish) leads the prayer and recites one thirtieth or somewhat more of the Quran spread over eight or twenty *rakabs* (those praying eight *rakabs* have longer recitations in each *rakab*); so that by the end of Ramadan the whole Quran will have been recited. It is natural that when a believer hears the Quran, his heart turns towards the meaning of the words that are being

recited. The *tarawih* prayers help in turning towards the Quran hearts which may not formerly have been focused on it.

Unfortunately, it has become a common practice for believers to focus on completing the recitation of the Quran quickly. It has even become the custom to complete the entire narration of the Quran in a marathon whole night session. This practice of one-night recitation is a clear innovation (*bid'ah*) and not permissible. The Quran is a source of spiritual nourishment, and believers are repeatedly asked in the Quran itself to reflect on its words, uncover their deep meanings and benefit from their wisdom. Recitation has its own reward, as it cleanses the soul but it is the meaning which is of the essence.

