

A Few Benefits of the Fast

In Islam, the spiritual, social, economic, political and psychological benefits of fast are interrelated, each affecting the other. Rituals regulate the Muslims' social and individual life and bring them closer to their Creator. A combination of fast, prayers, and meditation may be the very best dose for any and all psychological, financial, and spiritual ills from which one may be suffering.

They purify the soul, cleanse the intention, and bring about an abundance of good from the Almighty Who is ever-watching over us and Who desires nothing but good for His sincere servants.

On p. 353, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, al-Majlisi traces a saying of Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (as) saying that if one fasts at the beginning of a month, reciting in the first *rek'at* the Fatiha once and al-Ikhlas thirty times (i.e., as many as the maximum days of the lunar month), and the Fatiha once and al-Qadr thirty times in the second *rek'at*, following that with offering the poor something by way of charity, it will dispel everything about which he is apprehensive during the entire month.

Two other *rek'ats* are described in the same reference as having even a greater effect on a believer's life: Imam al-Jawad (as) is quoted saying, "Whoever offers two optional *rek'ats* at the very beginning of the month of Ramadhan, reciting in the first the Fatiha and the Fath, and in the other whatever *surah* (Qur'anic chapter) he likes, Allah, the most Exalted One, will not let him suffer anything bad during his entire year, and he will remain thus protected till the next year."

During the month of Ramadhan, the believers learn to curb their desires and check them against transgression, extravagance, and the yielding to the lower desires, all of which degenerate man and bring him to the pit of self-destruction and annihilation. Fast fosters a strong will, teaches patience and self-discipline, the ability to bear hardship and tolerate hunger and thirst. In short, it brings about a clear victory over one's illicit desires and selfish impulses.

It regulates and systemizes the energies of instincts. It trains the body to submit to lofty spiritual impulses. It safeguards the body's health by protecting it against extravagance. It grants its organs a respite so that they may be ready to resume their activities. As medical science has proved, it is a medicine for many bodily and nervous ailments.

It is a moral education, a nourishment of supreme virtues. It teaches the believer to abandon vices, to control emotions and instincts, to curb the tongue against saying what is wrong or inappropriate and the conscience against contemplating upon wrongdoing or subversion. It promotes the spirit of unity among members of the fasting community; it teaches them humility and humbleness and instills within them the feeling of equality before Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala*.

The rich have to observe it as well as the poor, the women as well as the men, the influential and powerful as well as the weak and downtrodden: they all have to observe the fast. It promotes the spirit of charity and compassion towards the poor and the needy, and it reminds each believer of the needs of other believers. Muslims share with each other Allah's blessings unto them.

The believers strengthen their ties with the Almighty, since they express through fast a continuous desire to obey His Will and carry out His commandments. They also strengthen their ties with one another, since the month of Ramadhan is the month of giving. It is the month for productive social inter-activity. Islam places a great deal of emphasis on moral excellence during this holy month.

The holy Prophet of Islam (S) has said, "One who, while fasting, neither guards his tongue from telling lies nor refrains from doing bad deeds does not respect his fast, while Allah does not approve of mere abstention from food... When you fast, you should not speak ill of anybody, nor should you be boisterous or noisy. If anybody speaks ill of you or tries to pick a quarrel with you, do not respond to him in the same manner; rather, simply tell him that you are fasting."

The institute of the fast is one of the signs of the Almighty's mercy on those who adhere to His divine creed, and it is never meant to put a hardship on anybody. The Almighty does not gain any benefit from putting hardship on anyone; on the contrary, He always tries to pave the way of happiness for His servants in this life and the life to come, and sometimes He even "pushes" them to do what is good for them, as is the case with making the fast of the month of Ramadhan obligatory on every believing man and woman.

But if you afford this great month a sincere and profound welcome, you will receive your rewards in many, many ways both in the short life of this fleeting world and in the eternal abode, Insha-Allah. Page 83, Vol. 1, of the first edition of al-Kulayni's *Al-Kafi*, as al-Majlisi tells us on p. 354, Vol. 94, of his own *Bihar al-Anwar*, citing his own father quoting his mentor Shaykh the renowned *faqih* Ali ibn Muhammad al-Madayni quoting Sa'eed ibn Hibatullah al-Rawandi quoting Ali ibn Abdel-Samad al-Naisapuri quoting al-Dooryasti quoting Shaykh al-Mufid saying that on the first day of the month of Ramadhan, one ought to supplicate thus:

Lord! The month of Ramadhan has arrived, and You have required us to fast during it and revealed the Qur'an as guidance to people and a clear distinction of the guidance and the right criteria. O Lord! Help us observe its fast; accept the same from us; receive our fast from and safeguard the same for us in an ease from You and good health; surely You can do everything.

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