

How to Embrace & Prepare for the Month of Ramadan

It is because of the will of the Almighty Allah (swt), that there would be certain days of each and every year which yield countless blessed opportunities, benefits, and rewards. As we currently begin to embrace the blessed month of Ramadan, the month of the Quran, the month of fasting, of Qiyam or night prayers, the month of giving, and the month which saves from hellfire. We ask the Almighty Allah, to not let us complete this month except that He forgives us our sins, and to accept our sincerest of actions. Verily Allah (swt) placed a great deal of emphasis on this blessed month, for it is a great opportunity for every muslim to benefit greatly from. It is a great opportunity for every sinner, to repent and to return unto the path of Allah. It is also a great opportunity for the pious believer – to maintain and increase his degree of piety.

It is from the characteristics of this month, that Allah (swt) revealed the Quran, and made it a constitution or doctrine for people to live by until the end of time. Allah (swt) states in Surat Al-Baqara, ***“It was in the month of Ramadan that the Quran was revealed as guidance for all mankind, clear messages giving guidance and distinguishing between right and wrong.”*** A second characteristic of this month, is that the gates of Heaven are open, the gates of hell are closed, and that the shayateen or devils are shackled and chained. Imam Bukhari & Muslim both narrate on the authority of Abu Hurayra (rda), that the Prophet (saws) said, ***“When the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of the heaven are opened and the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained.”*** A third characteristic of this blessed month is that Allah (swt) made every night of this blessed month, a night of saving his servants from hellfire – we ask Allah (swt) to make us among those saved inshaAllah. Imam Al-Tirmithi and Al-Baheqee both narrate that the Prophet (saws) said, ***“When it is the first night of the month of Ramadan, the devils and rebellious jinn are chained up, the gates of Hell are closed, And a caller cries out: ‘O seeker of good, proceed; O seeker of evil, abstain.’ And Allah has those whom He saves from the Fire, which happens every night.”***

The fourth characteristic of this blessed month, is that it contains a night also known as Laylatul-Qadr (the Night of Power), for this night is within the last 10 nights of Ramadan. Whoever spends this night

in sincere worship anticipating its reward, all this individuals previous sins will be forgiven. Imam Bukhari & Muslim both narrate on the authority of Abu Hurayra (rda) that the Prophet (saws) said, *"Whoever spends the night of LailatulQadr in prayer out of faith and in the hope of its reward, will be forgiven his previous sins."* A fifth characteristic is that Allah (swt) illustrates to us the significance and the level of importance he gave to fasting. Imam Bukhari & Muslim both narrate that the Prophet (saws) said, *"Allah (swt) said 'Every action of the son of Adam is for him except fasting, for that is solely for Me. I give the reward for it.'" The Prophet (saws) continues the hadith by saying, "The fast is a shield. "If one is fasting, he should not use foul language, raise his voice, or behave foolishly. If someone reviles him or fights with him, he should say, 'I am fasting,' twice. By the One in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, the breath of the one who is fasting is better in the sight of Allah on the Day of Resurrection than the smell of musk."*

A sixth characteristic of this blessed month is that Allah (swt) has made a month infused with mercy and blessings. Imam Al-Tabarani narrates on the authority of 3obada Ibn As-Samit (rda), that when the month of Ramadan approached, the Prophet (saws) would say, *"**Ramadan has come to you. (It is) a month of blessing, in which Allah covers you with blessing, for He sends down Mercy, decreases sins and answers prayers. In it, Allah looks at your competition (in good deeds), and boasts about you to His angels. So show Allah goodness from yourselves, for the unfortunate one is he who is deprived in (this month) of the mercy of Allah, the Mighty, the Exalted.**"*

From this my respected brothers and sisters, it is incumbent upon us that we take an oath or pledge with the Almighty Allah, for we are in a house among the houses of Allah, let us take a sincere oath that we return to the Almighty Allah, that we act upon His book the Quran, that our behaviors become the behaviors of the Quran, and that we imitate the Sunnah or traditions of our beloved Messenger (saws). Let us put forth a striving effort to change ourselves within, so that Allah (swt) may change our status and condition, for just as the Quran states, *"**Allah will not change the condition of a people, until they change what is in themselves.**"* From this comes a question which deserves great attention to, and that question is – how can I embrace and prepare for the month of Ramadan?

First, it is binding upon every Muslim to welcome the month of Ramadan with a truthful determination, and a sincere repentance; for if you are currently on a path of sin, distance yourself from that path, be remorseful in regards to your path of sin, and do not make a return to that sinful path. If you are disobedient towards your parents and have severed the ties with your kin and family, rush towards the obedience of your parents and reconnect the ties of kinship with your family members. Repent to Allah

a sincere repentance, and know, that Allah becomes happy and pleased with your repentance. Allah (swt) advises us in Surat Al-Zumar by saying, ***“My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God’s mercy, God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.”***

Let us recall in the following hadith Qudsi narrated by Imam Al- Tirmithi on the authority of Abu Hurayra (rda), let us recall exactly how Allah (swt) has called out unto you when He (swt) said, ***“O son of Adam, as long as you call upon Me and put your hope in Me, I have forgiven you for what you have done and I do not mind. O son of Adam, if your sins were to reach the clouds of the sky and then you would seek My forgiveness, I would forgive you and I do not mind. O son of Adam, if you were to come to Me with sins that are close to filling the earth, and then you would meet Me without ascribing any partners with Me, I would certainly bring to you forgiveness in comparison to filling the earth.”*** In another hadith Qudsi narrated by Imam Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra (rda), the Prophet (saws) said, ***“Allah (glorified and exalted be He) descends each night to the earth’s sky when there remains the final third of the night, and He says: ‘I am the King. Who is supplicating a prayer to Me that I may answer it? Who is asking forgiveness of Me that I may forgive him? Who is asking something of Me that I may give it him?’ for this continues until the hour of Fajr or dawn.”***

It is from here that the call of Allah (swt) unto his believing servants came, a call consisting of repentance and returning unto Him. Allah calls out in Surat Al-Tahreem, ***“O you who believe, turn to God in sincere repentance. Your Lord may cancel your bad deeds for you and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, on a Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet or those who have believed with him. With their lights streaming out ahead of them and to their right, they will say, ‘Lord, perfect our lights for us and forgive us: You have power over everything.”***

Secondly, it is crucial for every Muslim during this month to not let any time go to waste on things that derive no benefit, for each hour that passes is an hour lost that will not return. Al-Hasan Al-Basri states: ***“Not a day comes in which the dawn calls out and says: ‘O son of Adam, I am a new day, I am a witness for the deeds performed during my stay, take advantage of me, for if I depart, I will not return until the Day of Resurrection!”*** Most people say that time is golden, but in all reality, time is more valuable than gold itself. From this, some poets say in regard to this: “I wish my youth would return to me, so that I can inform him with what my old age has done to me.”

Indeed each and every Muslim should be aware that life is very short, and that fate is very near. Regardless of how long the night lasts, the light of dawn will still rise. Similarly, regardless of how long

life may seem, a grave awaits each and everyone of us. It was narrated that Al-Fadeel Ibn 3ayaad (may Allah be pleased with him) came across a man one day and asked him, "How old are you?" The man replied, "60 years old." Al-Fadeel then said to the man "For 60 years you have been getting closer and closer to Allah." The man replied, "To Allah we belong, and to Him we shall return." Al-Fadeel asked, "Do you know the meaning of this?" The man said, "Yes, I know that I am a servant of Allah, and that I will return unto Him." Al-Fadeel then said to the man, "Whoever knows that they are a servant to Allah, and that they will return to Him, surely they know that they stand between the hands of Allah. And whoever knows that they stand between the hands of Allah, they will also know that they are responsible. Whoever knows that they are responsible, they will prepare an answer for the questioning." Upon hearing this, the man cried and said, "What is the solution?" Al-Fadeel replied, "It's simple, the solution is that you should fear Allah for the remaining years you have left, and Allah will forgive you for all that in your past, and for all that is remaining."

From this we learn that the Muslim should strive by exhausting all of his/her efforts during the blessed month of Ramadan, just as our beloved Prophet Muhammed (saws) did. Imam Muslim narrates on the authority of Aisha (rdanha) who stated that ***"The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) used to strive more in worship during Ramadan than he strove in any other time of the year; and he would devote himself more (in the worship of Allah) in the last ten nights of Ramadan than he strove in earlier part of the month."*** In addition to this, it is required of the Muslim to strive in managing his/her time in doing acts of righteousness during this month, for we should all be aware that Ramadan's days are numbered and before you know it, it will soon come to an end.

It is important that we place great emphasis on how we manage our time, especially between work and worship. Keep consistent with the prayers in congregation, the taraweeh and night prayers, maintain the recitation of the Quran daily, make an effort to attend gatherings that will enrich you with knowledge – for the very least you should try and attempt for is finishing the recitation of the Quran once a month. Increase in your supplications, remembrance and asking for forgiveness from Allah. We should also be aware that any word you speak, you will be held responsible over it on the Day of Judgment. Not only that, but during this blessed month, the Muslim should strive his/ her efforts in practicing sincerity and devotion unto Allah in all of our actions, whether it be in secret or in public. One way to keep this in mind, is that we should all be aware that fasting in itself is a secret act of worship shared only between the servant and his Creator, the Almighty Allah (swt). If this act of sincerity and devotion is maintained, this individual will take on the approach for the rest of their lives, that Allah is

with me, Allah can see me, and that Allah is a witness over me. Again, if this approach is implemented, the believer will never be on a path of sin or disobedience towards the Almighty Allah.

Secondly, during this blessed month, the one who fasts should strive to increase patience when it comes to the obedience towards the Almighty Allah (swt). We learn that this type of patience specifically, the patience of worship and obedience towards Allah – is the most difficult type of patience to implement, and we learn this through our efforts to avoid being enticed, tempted, and following our desires during this blessed month. In addition to learning this type of patience comes the struggle against one's own self (also known as Jihad al-nafs). This is exactly why the month of Ramadan is also called the month of patience.

Thirdly, during this blessed month, the one who fasts should not only fast from food or drink, yet the Muslim should strive in fasting with all his bodies, limbs and senses from that which the Almighty Allah has prohibited us from. For example, fasting with your eyes to lower your gaze from what Allah has forbidden you to gaze at. Fasting with your tongue from ill speech, lying, backbiting, about others. Fasting with your ears from things you listen to or hear that can distract and take you away from the remembrance of Allah. Fasting with your hands in doing things which Allah prohibited you from doing, and fasting with your feet from taking you places in which Allah has forbade you to go. Having said this, the Muslim should be well aware that if he/she simply fasts just from eating and drinking, yet does not fast with the rest of his body, limbs, and senses, this individual will not have attained anything from fasting except hunger and thirst. In regards to this, Imam Ibn Maja narrates on the authority of Abu Hurayra (rda), the Prophet (saws) said ***"It may be that a fasting person attains nothing but hunger and thirst from his fasting."***

The fourth thing the fasting person can achieve during this blessed month is how to manage your time in an organized manner. We learn that the Islamic faith was the first religion to teach man how to manage time efficiently in an organized way. Evidence of this is the month of fasting itself, where we structure our day knowing specifically when its time to break our fast, and when it is time to abstain from eating. This form of time management will flourish in all aspects and help adapt managing our time efficiently in all of our daily affairs.

The fifth thing a Muslim should hold tight to during this blessed month is to learn how to spend and give in way of, and for the sake of the Almighty Allah (swt). When giving unto those less fortunate that are in need, this will help shape the Muslims heart in becoming lenient, merciful, and generous. Not only that, but this act of giving will help form solidarity among the members of the Muslim communities.

The sixth thing a Muslim should hold tight to during this blessed month, is to learn how to increase your taqwa or fear, piety, and mindfulness towards the Almighty Allah (swt). Abdullah Ibn Abbas (rda) states that taqwa is obeying Allah and not to disobey Him, to remember Allah and never forget Him, to be thankful unto Allah and to never disbelieve in Him. This is exactly what the Almighty Allah (swt) illustrated in His words when He stated in Surat Al-Baqara ***“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become pious.”***

Last but not least my respected brothers and sisters, every year we are reminded by the words of our beloved Prophet (saws) when he said, ***“Ramadan has come to you. (It is) a month of blessing, in which Allah covers you with blessing, for He sends down Mercy, erases sins and answers prayers. In it, Allah looks at your competition (in good deeds), and boasts about you to His angels. So show Allah goodness from yourselves, for the unfortunate one is he who is deprived in (this month) of the mercy of Allah, the Mighty, the Exalted.”***

We ask the Almighty Allah (swt) to accept and guide us through our fasting and prayers, to forgive us and make us among those saved from the hellfire.