



The Spiritual Aspect of Ramaḍān and Why We Fast

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One of the most important acts of worship in the blessed month of Ramaḍān is fasting during the day. Allāh ﷻ, through His infinite grace and mercy, grants countless blessings and rewards to those who observe the fast sincerely. However, for those who are unable to fast due to a valid reason, such as illness, travel, or old age, the mercy and blessings of Ramaḍān are not lost. Allāh ﷻ, in His wisdom and compassion, continues to reward them according to their intention and circumstances.

Allāh ﷻ has given certain actions greater value because of the place in which they are performed. For example, performing ṣalāh in Makkah carries a much greater reward than performing ṣalāh elsewhere, not because the action itself changes, but because of the sacredness of the place in which the action is performed.

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ الزُّبَيْرِ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: صَلَاةٌ فِي مَسْجِدِي هَذَا أَفْضَلُ مِنْ أَلْفِ صَلَاةٍ فِيَمَا سِوَاهُ مِنَ الْمَسَاجِدِ إِلَّا الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ وَصَلَاةٌ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ مِائَةِ صَلَاةٍ فِي هَذَا

"Prayer in this mosque of mine is better than a thousand prayers in any other mosque, except the Sacred Mosque. Prayer in the Sacred Mosque is one hundred times better than prayer in this mosque of mine." (Musnad Aḥmad, Ḥadīth 15685)

At times, an action becomes more valuable because of the time in which it is performed. For example, fasting may be observed on Mondays and Thursdays; however, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān carries far greater value and reward. This is due to the special status of the time in which the action is performed.

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " مَنْ صَامَ رَمَضَانَ إِيمَانًا وَاحْتِسَابًا غُفِرَ لَهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِهِ".

"Whoever fasts during the month of Ramaḍān with faith and seeking reward, his past sins will be forgiven." (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Book 2, Ḥadīth 38)

At times, both place and time are combined, and as a result, an action becomes greater in reward. For example, when Nabī ﷺ was returning from Ḥajj, a woman by the name of Umm Ma'qal came to him and said: "I truly wished to accompany you, but I had certain needs due to which I could not join you on this journey of Ḥajj. Now, what is the way for me to make up for the loss of not being with you?" Nabī ﷺ replied: "O Umm Ma'qal, perform 'Umrah in Ramaḍān, and Allāh ﷻ will grant you the reward as if you had performed Ḥajj with me."

وعن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما، أن النبي ﷺ قال: "عمرة في رمضان تعدل عمرة أو حجة معي".

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Umrah performed in Ramaḍān is equal to a Ḥajj," or he said, "equal to performing Ḥajj with me." (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

Allāh ﷻ, through His wisdom, has chosen the month of Ramaḍān for the completion of one of the pillars of Islam.

فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ

"So whoever among you witnesses the month must fast it." (Sūrah al-Baqarah: 185)

Allāh ﷻ has made fasting (ṣawm) obligatory upon Muslims from dawn (Fajr) until sunset (Maghrib).

The word Ramaḍān is derived from the Arabic word رَمَضَ or الرَّمَضُ, which refers to intense scorching heat. It is also linked to the word الرَّمْضَاءُ, meaning sun-baked sand.

Ramaḍān is the ninth month of the Islamic (Hijrī) calendar. It is a blessed month in which fasting has been made obligatory.

‘Ulamā explain that Ramaḍān is called Ramaḍān because:

- it burns sins just as heat burns impurities
- it softens and purifies the heart
- desires are weakened and the nafs is disciplined

Fasting during Ramaḍān offers many benefits to the body, mind, and soul. Physically, it helps the body reset, supports healthy weight control, and may reduce the risk of illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. Mentally, fasting develops focus, patience, and self-discipline, as it requires controlling one's desires. Ramaḍān also strengthens community bonds, bringing Muslims together to share ifṭār and support one another.

Most importantly, fasting carries deep spiritual benefits:

Allāh ﷻ says: "fasting has been made compulsory upon you." (Sūrah al-Baqarah: 183)

A command derives its importance from the one who issues it. If an ordinary person were to tell you to travel from Sydney to Melbourne, you would likely question their authority and ask, "Who are you to instruct me?" However, if your employer were to ask you to travel there for work, you would comply. Why? Because they have authority over you.

Likewise, when we truly understand who Allāh ﷻ is and recognise His greatness, this enables us to appreciate the weight of His commands and encourages us to fulfil what He has made obligatory.

The question many people ask is: why do we fast during Ramaḍān?

The primary reason Muslims fast is to obey the command of Allāh ﷻ as outlined in the Qur'ān:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ

"O believers, fasting has been prescribed for you." (Sūrah al-Baqarah: 183)

For many of us, unfortunately, fasting is often understood only in its technical sense, that we eat at Suḥūr and then abstain from food, drink, and marital relations until Iḥṭār. Surely, such a great command and a pillar of Islam cannot merely be about remaining hungry; there must be deep wisdom behind it.

Why has Allāh ﷻ made fasting compulsory?

1. Fasting creates a greater awareness of Allāh ﷻ.

When a person is fasting in Ramaḍān, and he sees a glass of cold water, what prevents him from drinking it? It is the awareness of Allāh ﷻ. Whether a person is in private or in public, fasting trains them to remain conscious of Allāh at all times.

For example, the second Khalīfah, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA), once walked quietly through the narrow streets of Madīnah at night, observing the people. He overheard a mother and her daughter speaking inside a small mud-brick house.

The mother said: “Tomorrow, when you take the milk to sell, mix it with water. That way we will make more money, even if today we earned very little.”

The daughter replied firmly: “Mother, we cannot do that. Did you not hear the Commander of the Believers, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA), forbid such practices?”

The mother responded: “And where is the Commander of the Believers now? He is not here, and he cannot see us.” The daughter replied, “Even if he cannot see us, Allāh ﷻ surely sees us.”

Now, this is the awareness Allāh ﷻ wants us to bring into our lives at all times through Ramaḍān.

2. Fasting helps us attain Taqwā.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

“O believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may attain taqwā.” (Sūrah al-Baqarah: 183)

One of the meanings of taqwā is self-restraint. Our desires, if left unchecked, naturally incline towards evil. We therefore need restraint and self-discipline. Fasting places a restriction upon us, which results in a reduction of our desires.

In Ramaḍān, we place a pause on our desires by abstaining from things that are normally ḥalāl, such as food and water. By training ourselves to give up what is permissible for the sake of Allāh ﷻ, we develop the self-control needed to stay away from that which is ḥarām outside of Ramaḍān. This practice reminds us that we are not slaves to our desires. It teaches us to think before we act and to make choices based on what Allāh ﷻ loves.

3. Through fasting, we learn submission.

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ

“Who can be better in religion than the one who submits his whole self to Allāh”
(Sūrah al-Nisā’: 125)

When we fast, we submit to the command of Allāh ﷻ. No one can say, “Suḥūr is at 5 and Iftār is at 7, so for me it is difficult; I will have Suḥūr three hours earlier and my Iftār three hours earlier as well.” Fasting is not about the number of hours we abstain, rather it is about fasting exactly according to the command of Allāh ﷻ.

Fasting teaches us that true obedience lies in following Allāh’s commands as He has prescribed them. Through fasting, we train ourselves to obey Allāh ﷻ, even when it is difficult or inconvenient.

4. Fasting teaches us patience and sacrifice.

Staying away from ḥarām requires sacrifice and ṣabr:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِيْنَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

“As for those who strive hard in Our cause, We will surely guide them to Our paths.”
(Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt: 69)

There is no doubt that fasting involves sacrificing our desires. When a person learns to struggle and make mujāhadah (effort and striving), all other acts of worship begin to feel easier, because the soul has been trained to push itself, whether it be ṣalāh, zakāh, or optional acts of worship.

وَهُوَ شَهْرُ الصَّبْرِ

"It is the month of patience."

Patience here has two meanings:

- steadfastness in avoiding sins, even when we are tempted
- persistence in performing good deeds, even when it is difficult

We fast with the intention of developing mujāhadah, so that obeying the commands of Allāh ﷻ becomes easier in all aspects of our lives.

5. Fasting makes us feel sympathy for the poor and builds compassion for them.

وَهُوَ شَهْرُ الْمَوَاسَاةِ

"It is a month of kindness, compassion, and sympathy."

We live in a very selfish world. After Ramaḍān, when we have three meals a day, go on holidays, and live comfortably in our homes, the thought of the poor often does not even cross our minds. However, in Ramaḍān, when we experience hunger ourselves, we begin to understand how difficult life can be. This experience develops sympathy and compassion for the poor.

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا - أَنَّ رَجُلًا، سَأَلَ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَيُّ الْإِسْلَامِ خَيْرٌ قَالَ " تَطْعُمُ الطَّعَامَ، وَتَقْرَأُ السَّلَامَ عَلَى مَنْ عَرَفْتَ وَمَنْ لَمْ تَعْرِفْ

"A man asked the Prophet (ﷺ), "What sort of deeds or (what qualities of) Islam are good?" The Prophet (ﷺ) replied, 'To feed (the poor) and greet those whom you know and those whom you do not know.'" (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Book 2, Ḥadīth 5)

6. Fasting creates a sense of unity.

Ramaḍān creates a strong sense of unity and brotherhood, as families and friends share the early morning and evening meals and spend more time together than they usually do during other months. The wider Muslim community also comes together through activities such as praying at night, distributing food to those in need, and attending sermons. Such an environment promotes harmony, unity, and solidarity among community members.

The month of Ramaḍān is a training ground that prepares us for the rest of the year. Through fasting, we learn to control ourselves. For thirty days, we tell our stomach: no food and no water. As a result, the heart takes control, and the body submits to the commands of Allāh ﷻ. This is how we train ourselves and remain conscious of Allāh.

Scholars explain that Ramaḍān is an ideal time to abandon bad habits. On Jumu'ah, we attend the masjid, listen to a reminder, feel motivated, and experience a spiritual high. However, after that, there are seven days in which that motivation can weaken. In Ramaḍān, Allāh ﷻ grants us thirty consecutive days and informs us that the shayāṭīn have been restrained.

Therefore, Ramaḍān is a prime opportunity to distance ourselves from bad habits and to cultivate the taqwā that Allāh ﷻ wants from each of us. If we fail to develop discipline in Ramaḍān and do not replace our bad habits with good ones, it becomes difficult to know when we will find another opportunity to truly reform ourselves.

The decision rests with you. Advice and guidance can be shared, but the desire and determination to change must come from within. When you sincerely seek ways to improve yourself, you will witness how your life begins to transform.

Virtues of Fasting

1. Fasting is uniquely attributed to Allāh ﷻ.

In the Qur'ān, Allāh ﷻ often refers other acts of worship back to the individual. For example:

وَلَا تَجْهَرُ بِصَلَاتِكَ

"Do not raise your voice excessively in your prayer." (Sūrah al-Isrā': 110)

However, when it comes to fasting, Allāh ﷻ says:

الصَّوْمُ لِي

"Fasting is for Me." (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Ḥadīth 7492)

2. The reward of fasting is not specified.

For many other acts of worship, Allāh ﷻ has specified clear rewards. For example, regarding Ḥajj:

مَنْ حَجَّ لِلَّهِ فَلَمْ يَرْفُثْ وَلَمْ يَفْسُقْ رَجَعَ كَيَوْمٍ وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ

Abū Hurayrah (RA) reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever performs Ḥajj for the sake of Allāh and does not engage in indecent speech or sinful behaviour will return as free from sins as the day his mother gave birth to him." (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Ḥadīth 1521)

When it comes to fasting, however, Allāh ﷻ did not specify a fixed reward. When the angels record our deeds, they document what is visible and measurable. For example:

- if a person recites the Qur'ān, they record how much was recited
- if a person performs ṣalāh, they record the number of rak'āt

These actions are outward and observable, making them easy to record.

But fasting is different. It involves abstaining from food, drink, and sinful behaviour, actions that are not outwardly visible. For this reason, in a ḥadīth qudsī, Allāh ﷻ instructs the angels to leave its reward to Him alone.

Abū Hurayrah (RA) reported that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

"كُلُّ عَمَلِ ابْنِ آدَمَ يُضَاعَفُ لَهُ الْحَسَنَةُ بِعَشْرِ أَمْثَالِهَا إِلَّا سَبْعِمِائَةٍ ضَعُفٍ . قَالَ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ إِلَّا الصَّوْمَ فَإِنَّهُ لِي وَأَنَا أَجْزِي بِهِ ."

"Every deed of the son of Ādam is multiplied, a good deed receiving tenfold up to seven hundredfold. Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, said: Except fasting, for it is for Me, and I Myself shall reward it." (Sunan Ibn Mājah, Ḥadīth 3823)

The statement وَأَنَا أَجْزِي بِهِ may be understood as "I will personally give its reward," or as some scholars explain, "I become the reward of the one who fasts."

When we feel hunger or discomfort while fasting, we should remember these virtues and rewards. Doing so makes the fast easier and more meaningful. Fasting should never be taken lightly; it is a unique act of worship and must be carried out exactly as Allāh ﷻ has commanded.

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"Whoever breaks the fast during Ramaḍān without an allowance or illness, then if he fasted for all time, his fasting would not make up for it." (Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī, Ḥadīth 723)

Conclusion

Fasting is more than abstaining from food and drink; it is an act of submission to Allāh ﷻ and a means of purifying the heart, mind, and soul. It teaches self-discipline, patience, and constant awareness of Allāh. Through fasting, we develop empathy for the less fortunate and strengthen our connection with our Creator. The spiritual benefits of fasting extend far beyond Ramaḍān, shaping our character and guiding our choices throughout the year.

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