

The Fruits of Fasting for the Servants of Allah

Ramadhan has come. Muslims all over the world are fasting from dawn until sunset.

The philosophy of the fast is well-known: It gives the servants of Allah a training in discipline, self-control, unquestioned obedience to God. It cultivates self-denial in Man so that he may be able to understand the problems facing the community and society.

Islam is a religion, compact and well-balanced. It is not just a collection of some unrelated ideologies and traditions. There is good reason behind every enjoyment, every tenet and every precept.

So compact is the whole Islamic system, in fact, that you cannot believe in it piece-meal; you have either to take it in its entirety or leave it in total; you cannot select from it.

Take, for example, the lunar system of the Islamic calendar. Though Islam recognises the solar year for the purpose of Zakat and Khums (agricultural taxes etc.), it insists on following the lunar system, in other matters, like fast and pilgrimage.

Why this double standard? The reason is simple enough. Islam is an universal religion; and the fast and pilgrimage are intended for the whole mankind, wherever they may be living.

And, the fact is one cannot pinpoint a single minute in a whole year which is equally convenient for the whole world.

Season and climate in the northern hemisphere are poles apart, literally, from those of the southern hemisphere.

Distance from the equator creates great differences between the climates of the lands situated in the same hemisphere.

Altitude belies all the theoretical calculations of geographers (the people of Europe did not believe, at first, that there was a snow-capped mountain — Kilimanjaro — near the Equator).

Directions of the mountains make two nearby lands radically opposed to each other in climate (had the

Himalayas been created North–South, instead of East West, the cold winds of North would have made the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent a second Tibet). The distance from the sea; the path of the sea–currents; direction of seasonal winds -----all these things have profound effect upon the climate and seasons of a given land.

For example, the Gulf Stream, being a hot current, makes countries warm even in Arctic Circle; and Dares Salaam, being on the sea shore, experiences less temperature changes than the interior regions.

I have described some of the factors which have effect upon the climates and seasons of a particular land. These factors have made the world a museum in which every conceivable kind of climate can be found in one or another corner at every given moment of the year.

Thus, it is just impossible to select a time of the year which can be equally suitable and acceptable to the whole world, for such rules as fasting and pilgrimage.

Had Islam accepted solar calendar for such religious functions it would have done a great injustice to a greater part of the world.

What would have been suitable, for instance, to India, could have been most inconvenient for Africa and/or America.

So, Allah selected a lunar calendar. about ten days than the solar calendar, cycle becomes complete in about 33 years.

As this system is shorter by the seasons rotate in it, and the

Thus a man of about 48 years of age, anywhere in the world, experiences every facility–and every hardship which the climate of his land can offer during Ramadhan.

Thus, nobody is favoured; and nobody is discriminated against.

Likewise, in pilgrimage: If a certain period of solar year would have been fixed, majority of the Muslims would have found themselves unable to go to Mecca. A farmer, in whose region it would have been cultivating or harvesting time, could never go to Hajj. Neither could a civil servant whose holidays did not coincide with the pilgrimage period. But, in a lunar system, the farmer can wait until the rotation of the seasons brings the Hajj in his off–season; and the civil servant can wait until it falls in his holiday time.

It is just one example of what I had said earlier — Islam is a compact unit in which every part has the utmost significance for other parts.

Pilgrimage, fast, lunar calendar, universality of Islam, equality of its followers in every respect in the eyes of God— these things may seem unrelated to each other to a layman. But, in fact, they are closely knit together and none of them can be neglected or torn without destroying the whole fabric.

During Ramadhan, Muslims abstain from eating and drinking, sexual relations and such things. A Shia

Ithna-Asheri has to abstain, in addition, from putting his head in water and from speaking a lie, however immaterial, about God, prophets, Imams and Bibi Fatima, the daughter of the Holy Prophet.

But it is only the external part of the fast. The soul and spirit of fast is something deeper. This aspect of the fast can very easily be explained in the words of our sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (a. s.).

He said: "Your fast day should not be like ordinary days. When you fast, all your senses — eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet — must fast with you. " How can these organs fast?

Eyes: Keep your eyes off unlawful things and objects; spend this most precious gift of God in good causes and pious acts; read the Qur'an, Duas, and books of knowledge.

Ears: Abstain from hearing unlawful gossip, lies, false statements, music and obscene topics; pay attention towards sermons and topics of learning.

Tongue: Do not tell lies or useless tales, do not spread rumours, and do not indulge in damaging gossip about other persons; keep aloof from falsity. Use the power of speech in spreading the word of God, in creating good will in the society.

Hands: Do not inflict injury upon others by your actions; instead strive to help them as far as possible.

Feet: Do not go towards, forbidden places, like bars and cinemas. Do not run between people creating strife. Go towards those places where God is remembered; and where you can find the means to purify your soul. And, above all, your heart and your mind must be with you in fasting. Because fast, in its real sense, will remain incomplete unless your thoughts, your emotions, your actions — in short, all aspects of your life — become pure, clean and free from blemish.

Thus, the fast should create in us an instinctive obedience to the Law of God.

I have heard about some people thinking that the fast of Ramadhan was not meant for the 20th century; or that the factory workers should be exempted from this obligation.

I think such big-headed persons are really in need of fasting more than anybody else. I mean, if a Muslim is unruly enough to disobey the commands of God, he should be made to fast so that he can acquire the habit of unquestioned obedience to God.

Such persons are the fittest candidates for fasting. They must read the commandments of Qur'an,

"O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you. . . . that ye may (learn) self-restraint ..."
(Qur'an, 2:183).

Self-restraint, piety, sympathy and purity of soul; these are the fruits of fasting. Let us strive to achieve as much benefit as we can from this Holy Month of God.

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