



Ramzan And The Significance Of Fasting

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During the month of Ramzan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, fasting for the whole month has been made obligatory for all Muslims. By way of explanation, the Quran tells us: "Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil." (2:183) At another place, the Quran has this to say: "He desires you to fast the whole month, so that you may glorify Him for having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him." (2:185)

How, just by abstaining from food and drink during the day, can the spirit of piety and thankfulness be inculcated? Fasting actually pertains to the spirit of the action and not to its form. Every such action has spirit and not just form. Similarly, all obligatory rites of worship have spirit as well form. For instance, the spirit of prayer

is humility. The spirit of zakat, almsgiving, is social service. The spirit of hajj is unity, and the spirit of fasting is sabr, patience.

In life, as we know from experience, patience is essential. According to God's creation plan, leading one's life without the exercise of patience is almost impossible, for God has granted freedom to all human beings. People have the choice of either misusing their freedom or making proper use of it. When individuals exercise this God-given freedom in the wrong way, many problems are likely to be faced by their fellowmen. It is in such situations that keeping patience is important.

In normal circumstances, a person leads life according to his desires. But a human being has been settled on earth in order that he may be tested, and he will be rewarded according to whether his deeds have

been good or bad.

That is why God has ordained a month of fasting each year. During fasting, a believer has temporarily to eschew even lawful things, such as the basic necessities of food and drink, without which he cannot survive. This is a very important training course designed to inculcate in a person the thinking that, over and above unlawful things, he should also be able to abstain from lawful things in order to fulfil God's commands. Moreover, according to a saying of the Prophet, fasting does not just mean abstaining from food and drink: fasting is, in reality, the act of abstinence from all inappropriate speech and action.

It is desired that one should lead a life of thankfulness to God. The very first verse of the Quran reads: 'Al-hamdulillah'. Those who utter these

words mean to say: "We are grateful to God who is the Lord of the Universe."

Man is only a taker, whereas God is the Giver. But when people continue to receive all kinds of blessings uninterrupted in this world, they become so accustomed to them that they take everything for granted as a matter of right. They unconsciously come to feel that they are getting everything not from God but from material sources, and are therefore unable to become truly grateful servants of God. For this reason, one is temporarily stopped from partaking of these blessings, so that he may be made to feel how precious these blessings are!

(The writer is chairperson, Centre for Peace and Spirituality International.)

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