

Ramadan: The month of study of the Quran

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Introduction

According to a tradition, at the end of the month of Shahban, the Prophet said addressing a group,

"You are in a blessed month." (Al-Baihaqi)

The Arabic word for *roza* or fasting is *saum*. The literal meaning of *saum* is abstinence. In the month of Ramadan a man abstains himself from many things, such as food, water etc and even his comfort. Hence, *roza* is the month that imparts training for leading a controlled and disciplined life. It is very important for man to keep himself under control because only then man is able to achieve higher success in life. Discipline concerns itself with both material and religious pursuits in man's life and therefore he must adhere to it sincerely.

The purpose of fasting

The second chapter of the Quran gives detail of *roza*. (2:183-185). Ramadan is a month of the Hijri calendar. It is the month in which the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet in Cave Hira. Since Quran was revealed in the month of Ramadan, this is the month when the Quran should be studied the most. In other words, Ramadan is the month of study of Quran. The Quran should not be merely recited but the deeper meaning of its verses should be understood by thinking and contemplating.

While fasting we abstain ourselves from food and water, but only partially, that is during the day hours. Since food and water are an essential component of our daily habits, abstaining from it changes the routine of life. This change in its *final* stage becomes what is referred to as *ihitiqaf* or seclusion. *Ihitiqaf* is when a person reduces his wants and desires to bare minimum needs of survival and confining himself thereof, leads a spiritual life in isolation. Such a person then spends his time in pondering and contemplating over the truths of life. The following example succinctly illustrates the focus of *ihitiqaf*.

India got freedom on August 15, 1947. When the clock struck twelve, Lord Mountbatten announced, "*Today India is free.*" Several books have been written on this subject. One such book

is *Freedom at Midnight* written by two authors, one from France and the other from Britain. In an interview given to a newspaper the two authors gave a description of how they wrote the book.

They said, "*We lived like hermits and we produced Freedom at Midnight.*" That is, leaving aside the worldly distractions, they dedicated themselves fully to writing the book. The same applies to *roza*. While fasting we have to become hermits and read the Quran to understand it. Because only then, we would apprehend the intended meaning of the truths described in this Book of guidance. People however, merely recite the Quran during the entire month and therefore do not understand its deeper meaning. We have to live a secluded life during Ramadan and confine ourselves to bare minimum needs to find an ocean of meaning in the Quran.

Reading Quran during Ramadan

Ramadan is the month of study of the Quran. Therefore, in this month we must read the Quran in detail and *think* upon its verses. Each verse would then reveal an ocean of meaning before the reader.

The very first verse of the Quran is,

"In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful." (1:1)

If we think over this verse, it will give us the secret of life. That is, the world in which we find ourselves has been created by a Compassionate and Most- Merciful Creator. This realization fills our hearts with hope and you will lead your life with this conviction that in every situation you shall receive divine succour and with it you shall be successful. Hope is the biggest treasure for mankind that which drives man to unimaginable limits. If there is no hope, man will never be able to achieve anything. Endless optimism is for that believer who lives in this world with this hopeful spirit.

The first chapter of the Quran says,

"All praise is due to God, the Lord of the universe." (1:1)

The word *hamd* in this verse is the extreme expression of praise and gratefulness for God. But as I started thinking, I realised that in view of the atrocities and unpleasant situations that we inevitably

face in our lives, praising God in the ultimate sense of the word seemed like a utopian concept. *How can we praise God or be grateful to Him despite being surrounded by negative situations every time?* In such a situation, true 'hamd' cannot emerge, only lip service would. This led me to

further think that the complaints which a person has against another are in reality less than 1% a part of life, while, God's bounties constitute more than 99% of life.

Most of the complaints are due to verbal exchanges but if we think about the mechanism that allows us to speak, we will be thrilled. Speech is a complicated process. Speaking involves physical actions to produce sound, as well as thoughts and responses from the brain which control these actions and decide what will be said. From the time our mind thinks and words are spoken by us, to the time it reaches the ear of the other person and is heard by him, it is nothing short of being incredible! If we think like this, we will realise that what we possess is much greater than what we complain about.

Consider another example, God created abundant water reserves on earth. Since water required a preservative, salt was mixed with it. Then by the process of universal desalination (rain cycle), fresh water came down on Earth. When we think about this process or the universal planning behind it, drinking a glass of water would result in a great thrill. Similarly, the various things which have been invented were potentially present in nature in the form of minerals and raw materials. Had these things not been provided by God we wouldn't have been able to develop anything. If we think about all this we'll live in super thrill, not complaints! We shall then be overwhelmed by a feeling of gratitude towards our magnificent Creator as a result of this tempest of thankfulness that would have arisen within us.

But we choose to live in complaints against men or man-made things and turn a blind eye to the bounties of God despite thanklessly availing them. This verse exhorts man to discover the bounties of God, awareness of which would lead him to become devoid of any hatred or

feeling of protest against anyone as God's bounties would far outnumber the tiny minority of atrocities that he may go through.

According to a verse in the Quran,

"It is a guide for those who are mindful of God." (2:2)

As I was wondering the reason as to why receiving guidance is conditionally for such men, I realised that the literal meaning of *Muttaki* is one who performs *taqwa* or is mindful and cautious. Such people are the ones who become seekers of truth and it is this seeking spirit which is essential for receiving guidance.

The Quran says thus,

"Did He not find you wandering and give you guidance." (93:7)

This verse clearly explains that being a seeker entitles one to receive guidance from the Book of God. That is, guidance is only for those who seek it. For being a seeker, we would need to activate our mind and adopt a considered way of living. Or else one would merely recite but will receive no guidance. In other words, the partial abstinence from food, water, comfort, and sleep in the month of Ramadan is to train man to become a hermit so that he can save himself from worldly distractions and can ponder and deliberate upon the teachings of the Quran.

But the biggest evil today is the false family activities that remain the prime occupation in every household even during the month of Ramadan. Such people lead only family-oriented lives and their greatest concerns pertain to the menu of their dinner or iftar-parties. Such indulgences spare them no time to study, think and receive the guidance from the Quran. Fasting like this is tantamount to not having observed the fast at-all.

Spirit of roza

During the month of Ramadan, the mosques and the madrassas are filled with literature propagating various duas and activities that should be done during this month. Ironically, these only focus on the form as against the Quranic teachings that stress on the inculcation of the right spirit during Ramadan.

The spirit of *roza* is to inculcate *taqwa* (mindfulness), *hamd* (acknowledgement) and *shukr* (thankfulness) in an individual. It exhorts man to live in the glory of God, in prayer and gratitude towards the munificent Creator. A person, whose only focus is to eat lavishly at the end of the day, lacks the very spirit of *roza*.

The focus of this month is to live in the study of the Quran so much so that in the last part of the month *Ihtikaf* may be practiced. *Ihtikaf* is devoting oneself to the study of Quran in seclusion, devoid of all sorts of distraction. According to a Hadith,

"The miracles of the Quran will never end." (Mishkat)

This verse means that there is an unending ocean of meaning in the Quran, so the more you think, the more you discover. It is for this reason that the first verse revealed to the Prophet was, "Read." Hence, one who reads the Quran like a hermit in the month of Ramadan will rediscover the Quran every year.

Quran: warning to all mankind

According to a verse of the Quran,

"The Quran has been revealed to me so that through it I may warn you and whoever it reaches." (6:19)

It was after the beginning of the revelation of the Quran that Prophet started performing *dawah* work. We must therefore understand that Quran is revealed as a *kitab-e-tabligh*. It came as guidance for mankind and therefore, in this it is implicit that it should be spread to whole mankind. This was the work of the Prophet and it got transferred to his followers. And since Ramadan is the month of the Quran, in this month we must study the Quran more and more to prepare ourselves for *tabligh* or preaching.

Doomsday is fast approaching

Predicting the approach of the doomsday, the Prophet said,

"There will be three periods of drought - in the first period, one-third water will get over and resources would start depleting, in the next period two-third water will be finished and in the third phase all the water from earth will get over." (Musnad Ahmad)

The survival of human life depends upon water. Life cannot be imagined without water. It was for this reason that large reservoirs of water were created in the form of oceans and seas but due to global warming, the glaciers started melting and the snow on the mountains started to melt and flow away into the sea. Hence, fresh water reservoirs started getting mixed with the salty water of the seas. Many rivers like the Ganges are drying and there is great concern about water all over the world. The prediction of the Prophet of the age in which one-third water of the earth will dry has come true. Now we are approaching the second age when two-third water of the world will get over. This is a very serious situation.

As per my analysis, this is the time when the following Hadith would come true and *itkhal-e-kalima* would take place,

"No house on Earth – big or small – will remain but God's Word shall enter into it."
(Musnad Ahmad)

For this to become a reality, the believers will have to stand up for the cause of spreading the word of God. Giving Quran in Arabic would not suffice as conveying God's message. The Quran needs to be spread in people's understandable language. In today's times, English has got the status of being the most widely accepted language internationally. The time has come when all our money, time and energy should be spent for the purpose of spreading the word of God. The month of Ramadan should be the month to take the pledge,

"O! God, give us resources for completing the process of Itkhal-e-kalima!"