

# Ramadan and Taqwa

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Ramadan is not simply the month of Muslim fast; Ramadan is a rebirth. It is the rebirth of self-esteem. Having felt down-trodden and overworked on one hand, or simply drifting and useless on the other, Ramadan makes us feel valuable and important again. Each of us suddenly becomes the main character in the drama of life, and the role is a noble one. There is no audience, and even if there were, we wouldn't care for its opinion. We don't need cheers, and would feel impervious to jeers. Each person assumes his responsibility as designated by the true Director who directs all -seeking His approval only, and nothing else. It is teamwork among characters, and never fails to be crowned with success.

God's most sacred gift to us is the mind. And in Ramadan we have time to think. Truly think. We reassess our priorities, re-evaluate ourselves, discovering weaknesses and uncovering abilities. We have one whole month to plan strategies and gain motivation, and the beauty of it all is that we have to start at full force. Would it then not be a shame if we were to lose momentum?

*O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you*

*As it was prescribed to those before you*

*So that ye may (learn) Heedfulness*

HQ: 2:18

In Arabic, the word translated as Heedfulness is '*Taqwa*', from the verb '*yattaqi*' which means taking heed in thought and action. When one takes heed, one is fully aware and careful, trying to stay on the right course. When Omar Ibn Khattab asked Ubay Ibn Ka'b about the meaning of *Taqwa*, he replied:

"Have you ever ventured upon a path that had thorns?"

"I have," replied Omar.

"What did you do?"

"I held up my clothes and did my best not to step upon the thorns."

"That is *Taqwa*," replied his friend.

And Abu Huraira was asked about *Taqwa*, to which he also gave the simile of the path.

"And what did you do?"

"When I would see the thorns, I'd step aside, or step across, or stop short."

"That is *Taqwa*," was Abu Huraira's reply.

The reason for fasting is to obtain *Taqwa*. The rewards of *Taqwa* are manifold and are felt immediately, continuing into the Hereafter.

*O ye who believe!*

*If you heed God, ~*

*He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong)*

*Erase (all record of) your misdeeds and forgive you,*

*For God is the Lord of grace unbounded.*

*HQ:8:29*

\*In another verse:

*'...And He will provide you a light by which ye shall walk...'*

*HQ:57:28*

That, then, is the most important characteristic we gain by fasting in Ramadan. A certain consciousness, a special awareness, and actions that mirror our feelings. Heedfulness, by which we gain the 'criterion', the perceptive knowledge of right and wrong, which leads us to righteousness. We are thus amongst those who taste the boundless Grace of God.

*As to the righteous (who were heedful in life)*

*They will be in the midst of gardens and springs*

*Taking joy in that which their Lord gives them*

*For, before that, they were doers of bounteous good deeds*

*They used to sleep but a small part of the night*

*Praying for forgiveness in the early dawn*

*And (forgetting not that) in their wealth was a right  
(to be offered) to him who asked  
And him who asked not though in need.”*

HQ:51:15

But the first two verses are addressed to 'those who believe'. Does that mean that those who do not believe are not invited to taste God's boundless Grace? How could His Grace be boundless, and then be bound to include only a few?

*O Mankind!  
Worship your Lord  
Who created you  
And those before you  
That ye may learn Heedfulness.*

HQ:2:21

This verse is an invitation to the whole of mankind; an invitation to worship our Lord Creator, after which we may learn Heedfulness as those who worshipped Him before us must have done. Once we've acknowledged our faith in God and our readiness to worship Him alone, having *then* become believers, we are asked for deeds of worship. The levels of Heedfulness, or awareness, are constantly raised with every good deed or sincere act. This awareness is the essence of true faith. It should focus, first and foremost, upon ourselves. Our consciences that had previously been outstripped by our desires and daily needs and activities, now have a chance to be heard. We should not bury our previous feelings of guilt, but rather, bring them to the surface and mend the wrongs we had committed earlier.

Fortunately, the wrongs we commit against our own selves are easier forgiven than others. We only need to beg God's forgiveness with sincerity, and the genuine intention not to repeat that wrong in future. Then we prove our repentance by conforming to the best of our ability, to what He has enjoined upon us. This category comprises all the duties God has entrusted us with, as well as all that He has prohibited, as long as what we did or didn't do was

not directed at any living creature. If we hadn't involved or harmed other beings, we would be considered as 'having wronged our own souls.' Since Almighty God is not affected by whatever we do or do not do, sins that appear to be 'against' Him fall into this category. They are truly sins against our own souls because we have caused ourselves the subsequent pain and suffering and have prevented ourselves from the pleasure and enjoyment, reaping the fruits of our own deeds. On the other hand, wrongs committed against others would not be forgiven by God unless the victims of our deeds forgive us. This is ultimate justice, where nothing escapes God, whose knowledge encompasses all.

Ramadan is the only time of year when Muslims meet together in a unified stand, with one common goal. This kind of brotherhood should have been more common, and had most of us been sincere, we could have met on common planes most of the time. But with the present-day political, regional and sectarian differences, this meeting has become rare, and therefore, all the more valuable. To apply this on a smaller scope, we could show sincere feelings of brotherhood to the Muslims in our community, regardless of background. We could settle differences and forget grudges.

Ramadan is the time for striving high! Reaching higher and higher into that idyllic world where peace reigns; where people love each other, where families are united. In that idyllic world, the basic needs of the body and its earthly desires are curtailed and limited, controlled by our willpower, giving way to nourishment of the soul, to selflessness and a driving desire for God's approval and forgiveness. Where prayers are mingled with tears, and where pangs of hunger are welcomed, mingled with pangs of guilt, reminders of previous self-indulgence. This taste of the ideal is ours for one month, and the fruits remain for us to taste and remember until we meet Ramadan again. The gist is, however, that with the passing of each Ramadan, we should try to retain some of its blessings, and continue our progress towards the ideal. But sadly enough, some of us let that new life slip away again, soon after Ramadan has closed its doors.

Everyone who values Ramadan knows how rapidly those wonderful days and nights fly! How our efforts seem easier than they were, and how joyous the last few days are, when we

feel that all our previous shortcomings and failures have been forgiven and we are reborn. Let us not throw away that blessing. Let us not make of Ramadan a performance with two acts: starvation and satiation. Let our faith bloom on, watered by Ramadan tears. Let us now, enjoin upon ourselves a promise, made to ourselves, that we shall not let Ramadan go by without raising our level of *Taqwa*. If we think this Ramadan, and decide, on how to improve ourselves as true Muslims and how best to serve our community while serving our Maker, we would have begun to fulfill the role He designated for us in life.

**Randa Hamwi Duwaji for GULF NEWS: Monday, February 22, 1993**