

Fasting (Sawm)

Date: 11/03/24

Q, Describe the importance and philosophy of fasting (Sawm). Also explain its individual and collective benefits.

1) Introduction:

Fasting (Sawm) is one of the many forms of Islamic worship (ibadah), and the fourth most important pillar of Islam. It helps man reach the zenith of both, spiritual and physical perfection. As such, all healthy and mature Muslims are required to fast from dawn to dusk in the sacred month of Ramadan (the month of Quran's first revelation) and increase their service to Allah Almighty. The significance of this religious ritual is such that it can only be omitted under a few circumstances, and its basis is the fact that human beings are creatures of Allah (SWT), and thus, His bond-servants. Allah, therefore, asserts in the Glorious Quran:

“O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you - as it was for those before you - so perhaps you will become mindful [of Allah].”

(Al-Quran, 2: 183)

2) The Philosophy of Sawm:

The Arabic word for fasting is 'sawm' which literally means to abstain.

Eating

Drinking

Whilst observing Sawm
one must abstain
from

Cursing

Other
bodily
needs

This practice of devoting a certain period of the year for exclusive worship was prevalent even before the prophethood of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). In his biography of the Prophet (PBUH), Muhammad Hussein Heykal, termed this tradition as the "Arabs annual retreat." He provides that during Ramadan, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) would pray uninterruptedly in the cave of Mount Hira' to attain peace and solace.

To continue this tradition, Islam enjoined Muslims to observe Sawm in the month of Ramadan in order to learn 'taqwa' (piety), making a believer God-conscious at all times. In this way, a believer

always remains in tune with Islamic teachings, avoiding evil activities and indulging merely in good actions.

3) Importance of Fasting:

As the fourth most important pillar of Islam, fasting carries great significance. During the month of Ramadan, the Lord of the Universe, Allah Almighty, chains the Satan, closes the doors of Hell, and opens the doors of Paradise.

Furthermore, al-Ghazali provides that fasting helps an individual attain the divine quality of "Samadiyyah" (freedom from want), allowing moderation and decency to prevail. Likewise, Shah Waliullah Dahlenawi viewed fasting as a means "to rejuvenate angelic elements in human beings. Thus, the Noble Quran testifying the significance of Sawm asserts that:

“وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَعَالَمِينَ”

“But to fast is best for you, if you only knew.”

(Al-Quran, 2: 184)

3a) The Night of Laylat-ul-Qadr: First Revelation of the Glorious Quran

The Night of Power (Laylat-ul-Qadr) further highlights the importance of the month of Ramadan. It was on this night that the archangel, Hazrat Jibrail (AS), delivered the first revelation of the Noble Quran to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Due to the unmatched significance of this night, Allah (SWT) erases the sins of a believer who prays on this night. The Prophet (PBUH), thus, states that:

"There is a night in it, which is better than one thousand months."

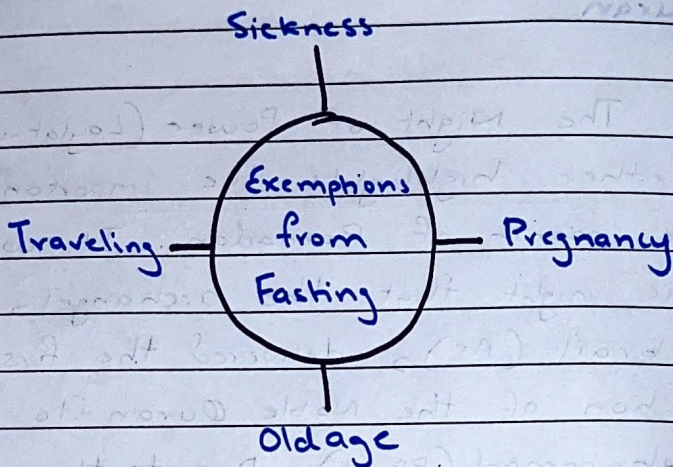
(Sahih Muslim)

This, therefore, perfectly highlights the importance of fasting, and more importantly, of the month of Ramadan.

4) Exemptions from Fasting:

As Allah (SWT) does not burden His slaves more than they can bear, He has set certain exemptions from fasting, as elucidated/illustrated

below:



It must, however, be noted that travellers and those who are sick must make up for the skipped fasting on other days. For others, Allah (swt) states in the Quran:

“And for those who cannot afford it there is ransom, the feeding of a (miskin man) in need.”

(Al-Quran, 2:184)

S, Impacts of Sawm on Individuals:

Sawm offers an enormous number of spiritual, moral, and physical benefits to individuals - as elucidated below:

S₁ Fasting Rejuvenates the Faith of an Individual:

Fasting renews the faith of an individual as s/he is required to worship Allah Almighty throughout the month. This brings him/her closer to his/her Creator and rejuvenates his/her faith.

Sb) Fasting Completely Reforms an Individual:

By abstaining from eating, drinking, smoking, and other bodily needs, an individual learns self-mastery. This allows the individual to realise the his/her true nature (purity) and he/she is able to easily give up on his/her bad habits, such as smoking or cursing.

Sc) Sawm Protects one from Vice:

As an individual learns self-mastery, he follows the injunctions of the Quran whole-heartedly and dedicatedly, and always remains away from misdeeds.

Sd) Fasting Inculcates Patience:

Fasting inculcates patience in man as he has to exercise self-restraint and overcome his material passions. The Prophet of Allah (PBUH) explained this by stating:

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« وَالصَّوْمُ نِصْفُ الْعَبْرِ »

« Fasting is half
of Patience »

(Prophet PBUH)

This then enables man to remain patient during hardships. For instance, this Ramadan will help all Muslim Pakistanis to remain patient during the economic crisis that the nation is currently mired in.

Seq Allah Generously Rewards those who Observe Sawm:

Allah (SWT) generously rewards those who fast by forgiving all their sins. The Prophet (PBUH) epitomised this by expressing:

« Fasting is a shield for you as it saves you from sins in this world and would protect you from hell in the Hereafter. »

(Sahih Muslim)

Sf) Fasting opens the Doors of Paradise:

Allah (SWT) has reserved an exclusive gate of Paradise known as 'Ar-Rayyan' for those who remain steadfast in their fasts.

The Messengers of Allah (PBUH) testified this by explaining:

"Indeed, there is a gate of Paradise called Ar-Rayyan, through which only those who fasted will enter on the Day of Resurrection..."

(Sahih Bukhari)

Sg) Fasting Has a Plethora of Health Benefits:

Fasting offers a plethora of health benefits to individuals. It is, for instance, admitted to have been one of the oldest therapies within the Hippocrates used to heal the body. Likewise, recent research reveals that it is the nature's medicine for heart diseases, allergies, diabetes, etc.

6) The Collective Benefits of Sawm:

Sawm has many benefits the society in many ways, as explained below:

6a) Socio-economic Benefits of Fasting:

As the holy month of Ramadan develops empathy, the rich spend very generously and help the poor in any way they can. This enables the poor strata of society to fulfil its needs.

6b) Sawm Promotes Equality:

Sawm promotes egalitarianism in society as all Muslims, rich and poor, white and black, Arabs and non-Arabs, and so on have to fast and experience hunger and privation to an equal degree.

6c) Fasting Unites Muslims:

As all Muslims are required to fast, they become united. For this reason, Allah declares all Muslims as brothers:

« إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ »

« Certainly all Muslims

are brothers ”

(Al-Quran, 49:10)

6d) Sawm Ensures Collective Peace and Social Justice :

Due to the concept of equality and brotherhood, Muslims become kind to one another and maintain peace in all domains of life. Allah, therefore, asserts in the Quran:

“ **إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ** ”

“ God commands justice and fair dealing ”

(Al-Quran, 16:90)

7) Conclusion :

In conclusion, fasting, as the fourth most important pillar of Islam, is crucial for Muslims to attain physical and spiritual perfection. It promotes equality and unity in society, enabling the Muslim world to flourish and prosper in all fields of human existence. Thus, one must acknowledge the significance of the beautiful gift given by Allah Almighty to mankind: ~~Sawm~~. Sawm.