



Life With Allah

Connecting to The Creator

Ramadan Series: 3

Fasting and the Tranquil Soul



Fasting and the Tranquil Soul



Life With Allah

الحياة مع الله



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Fasting & The Purification of The Soul



The greatest need of our time is for us as believers to return to Allah and focus on purifying our souls (tazkiyat al-nafs). The root of most of the world's problems is diseased hearts. Hearts which do not know Allah, hearts which are full of arrogance, greed and selfishness. Hearts which have become corrupted by sins and no longer taste the sweetness of īmān. Hearts torn apart by pride, envy and hatred, resulting in a fractured ummah.

Whilst we have external enemies – the shayāṭīn of the jinn and humans – we have a **greater enemy lurking within:** the nafs (inner self/ego). Our nafs encourages us to disobey Allah ﷻ and to give preference to this worldly life.

In an era where we are bombarded with doubts (shubuhāt) and desires (shahawāt), it is even more important that we learn about the nature of our nafs, what purifies it and what beautifies it. Allah ﷻ says,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا
وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

“Successful indeed is the one who purifies their soul, and doomed is the one who corrupts it!” (91:9-10).

المصداق

The Prophet ﷺ would ask
Allah ﷻ to purify his heart:

اللَّهُمَّ آتِ نَفْسِي تَقْوَاهَا ، وَزَكِّهَا أَنْتَ خَيْرُ
مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ، أَنْتَ وَلِيِّهَا وَمَوْلَاهَا ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي
أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ لَا يَنْفَعُ ، وَمِنْ قَلْبٍ لَا
يُخْشَعُ ، وَمِنْ نَفْسٍ لَا تَشْبَعُ ،
وَمِنْ دَعْوَةٍ لَا يُسْتَجَابُ لَهَا

*O Allah, grant my soul taqwā (piety) and
purify it, for You are the Best of those who
can purify it. You are its Protector and
Master. O Allah, I seek Your protection from
knowledge which does not benefit, a heart
which does not submit, a soul which is not
satisfied and a supplication which
is not accepted. (Muslim)*

The Three Types of Nafs

There are three types of the nafs (inner self):

1 The inciting soul (al-nafs al-ammārah bil-sū’):

This is when the nafs commands the person and tells it what to do, and the person willingly obeys. This person is controlled by their nafs, and sins unashamedly.

2 The self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāmah):

This type of person sins, but then feels shame and blames himself for sinning. This leads him to repent. This type of person is in a constant battle with their nafs.

3 The tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma’innah):

This person is content with what Allah has ordained, and finds tranquillity in that which pleases Allah. He desires only good and hates evil.

The nafs is not static. It changes between these states. When we reflect on the **purpose of fasting and Ramaḍān, we will realise that one of its key aims is to elevate the soul to its intended station: the tranquil soul.**

This is perhaps why in Ramaḍān, many of us feel more at peace, as we sin less and focus on pleasing Allah.

The Sound Heart

If we wish to be successful on the Day of Judgement, then in this world we must develop a **sound heart (qalb salīm)**. Allah ﷻ has informed us:

“...The Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit. Only those who come before Allah with a pure heart (will be saved)” (26:88-9).

In order to achieve a sound heart, we must:

- 1 Purify our hearts from its ‘diseases’ and evil characteristics**, such as shirk, showing off (riyā’), envy, hatred, pride, greed, heedlessness, hypocrisy, and the love of the world and leadership.
 - 2 Beautify our hearts with the ‘actions’ of the heart and praiseworthy characteristics.** These include: firm belief (īmān), knowledge of Allah (ma‘rifah), sincerity (ikhlāṣ), piety and mindfulness (taqwā), trust in Allah (tawakkul), hope (rajā’), fear (khawf), gratitude (shukr), patience (ṣabr), love (ḥubb), yearning for Allah (shawq) and certainty (yaqīn), and excellent character when dealing with the creation of Allah, such as kindness, mercy, love, forgiveness, generosity, humility etc.
- “Occupying yourself with purifying your heart is better than an abundance of prayer and fasting whilst your heart is corrupt.” – Ibn Rajab ﷺ

Fasting & Purification

Fasting purifies the body from toxins, revitalizes it, and cleanses the body's inner system. More importantly, if performed properly, fasting purifies the (spiritual) heart of the believer. Desires (of the stomach, private parts, wealth and fame) form a barrier between our hearts and Allah. Our hearts were created to know and worship the One who created them ﷻ. When we move away from Him, and sin, our hearts become imbalanced and agitated. Thus, fasting takes our hearts back to a state where we are more aligned with our Creator.

The Prophet ﷺ said, **“Fasting the Month of patience (i.e. Ramaḍān) and three days of every month removes the 'evil traits' (waḥar) of the heart”** (Aḥmad).

Waḥar includes hatred, anger, hypocrisy, hard-heartedness, and the whispers of shayṭān.

The more we fill our stomachs, the lazier we feel to worship Allah. By fasting, we remove the fuel (food and drink) for our desires, thereby increasing the space within our hearts to remember Allah and worship Him.

One of the best ways to purify the soul is to always remember and think that Allah is with you. A companion asked the Messenger ﷺ, “What is the **tazkiyah** (purification) of oneself, O Messenger of Allah?” He ﷺ replied, **“To know that Allah is with him wherever he may be”** (Ṭabarānī).

Constantly reminding ourselves that Allah is watching us (also known as murāqabah) is an integral component of taqwā (piety). And taqwā is the primary goal of fasting. Whilst taqwā manifests itself in outward forms of obedience, its primary residence is in the heart. Our beloved Prophet ﷺ told us, **“Taqwā is here, taqwā is here, taqwā is here,” whilst pointing to his chest** (Muslim).

This close connection with Allah, where we are always mindful of Him, makes us aware of what thoughts and feelings we let into our hearts. This helps us to purify our negative thoughts and actions, including the ill-feelings we have towards fellow believers, and the whisperings of shayṭān. In this manner, our hearts are purified from waḥar.



Diseases of the Heart

Reading and reflecting on the symptoms and diagnosis of the diseases of the heart – as specified by our beloved Prophet ﷺ and our pious predecessors – will help us to actively work on purifying our hearts throughout this blessed month. The following are some of the key diseases we can focus on inshāAllāh.

1 Pride

Reflect:

- Do I get angry and feel resentful when someone corrects my mistakes?
- Am I overly sensitive when given advice?
- Do I feel that my knowledge, wealth, and status is because of what I have achieved?
- Do I feel that every blessing in my life is because of my own hard work?
- Do I become bitter when I do good for someone and they do not appreciate it?

Pride is the **mother of all spiritual diseases**. It is extremely destructive and one of the most difficult diseases to cure. Sometimes we take pride in our wealth, lineage, beauty, power, children, and even our knowledge and worship.

There are degrees of pride. Extreme pride and arrogance lead to outright kufr and the rejection of Allah. The **victim thinks he has no need for his Creator** and attributes all his success to himself.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “The person who has the slightest amount of pride in his heart will not enter Paradise... Pride is to reject the truth and belittle people” (Muslim).

To remove pride, we must recognise our worth. Allah created us from broken soil and unclean sperm. We were nothing, and Allah gave us life. We should **contrast this lowly state with the magnificence of Allah**, and this should help us remain humble.

Feeling hunger during our fast should help us **reflect on our weakness and desperate need for Allah**. It should remind us to stay humble and remove the pride from our hearts.

2 Envy

We live in an age of envy. Gone are the days where we would only envy those whom we saw. Thanks to social media, we have access to the little details of millions around the world. This often leaves us feeling envious of lifestyles we see others enjoying, but we ourselves cannot have access to. Even though we know that images are heavily filtered and present a distorted image of reality, this does not stop our hearts from feeling envy.

Envy (ḥasad) is being resentful of what others have, and wishing that they would lose that blessing. Sometimes this

feeling creeps up on us without us realising. **If we fight back against it, inshāAllāh we will be rewarded.** However, if we act upon this feeling, and allow it to eat up our insides, then this is ḥarām.

Envy ruins our good deeds. It leads to hatred and tension. It tears down relationships and breaks families.

A remedy for treating envy is to reflect on why we are envious of that person. And then think about who Allāh is, and how much He has given us. Allāh is Al-‘Adl (The Most Just) and we should be content with His decree. Perhaps we envy one thing about that person, but are unaware of ten other problems that this person faces.

Ramaḍān is a month to detox from social media. Constantly seeing profiles and updates from ‘photoshopped’ lives leads to ungratefulness, self-loathing and even depression. This often stems from the envy that social media triggers. Let us leave this vice, and we will feel happier and content inshāAllāh.

“ Beware of envy, for it consumes good deeds, just as fire consumes wood or grass” (Abū Dāwūd).

3 Hatred

There is nothing shayṭān loves more than tearing up relationships and shattering sacred bonds. Our beloved Prophet ﷺ said, “The deeds are presented every Monday and Thursday. **Allāh forgives every person who does not associate anything with Allāh on that day, except the**

person who holds hatred towards his brother. It is said, ‘Leave them until they have both reconciled, leave them until they have both reconciled’” (Muslim).

Similarly, he ﷺ said, “No one should convey to me anything regarding one of my companions, for **I love to meet you with a pure heart**” (Aḥmad).

When Zayd b. Aslam ﷺ entered upon Abū Dujānah ﷺ in his final illness, his face was glowing. When he was asked for the reason behind this, he said, “There are two deeds which I am depending on: firstly, I only used to speak about matters which concerned me; and secondly, **I always maintained a pure heart towards my fellow Muslims.**”

“ Glad tidings to the one whose own faults occupied him from the faults of others. Woe to the one who forgot his own faults and occupied himself with the faults of others.” – Ibn al-Qayyim ﷺ

A common cure for treating these diseases (pride, envy and hatred) is to **be good** to those you have these negative feelings towards. Give them gifts, and do nice things for them, especially when you don't feel like doing so. Praise them when you heart seeks to criticise or backbite about them. Meet them with respect and humility. **Do du‘ā’ for them, especially when your heart does not incline to do so.**

May Allah al-Quddūs (The Pure) make our fasting the means for purifying our hearts.

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Taqwa: The Purpose of Fasting



Why do you fast? Is it because everyone around you does? Is it because it's one of the five pillars?

Have you ever wondered why it is one of the five pillars? Although we strive to learn about the legal rulings of fasting, we often miss out on reflecting upon and attaining the spiritual elements of fasting. **Fasting is a deeply spiritual act of worship. It is meant to transform us, both internally and externally.**

The greatest purpose of fasting has been given to us in the Qur'an. Allah says,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ


"...Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may attain taqwā (piety and mindfulness of Allah)" (2:183).

Thus, the **purpose of fasting is to attain taqwā**. Taqwā is to **protect yourself from the punishment of Allah by avoiding His prohibitions and implementing His commands**.

Taqwa is the believer's provision in his journey to Allah al-Aḥad (The One). All the Prophets of Allah called their people to worship Allah and to live a life of taqwā. Taqwā is the path to attaining the love, mercy and help of Allah. Taqwā allows us to distinguish between truth and falsehood, to overpower shayṭān and gain victory over our enemies. Through taqwā, our sins are forgiven, great rewards are amassed, and our

deeds are accepted. Through taqwā, our difficulties are eased, and Allah al-Razzāq (The Ultimate Provider) provides for us from where we could not even imagine! Taqwā is the ultimate ingredient for success, as it is a shield from the Hell-fire and the path to Paradise.

How does fasting lead to taqwā?

The purpose of fasting is to train the nafs to restrain itself from its desires. Ibn al-Qayyim  described fasting as the 'rein of the muttaqīn (the pious)'.

When we fast, we temporarily make ḥarām on ourselves what is usually ḥalāl (eating, drinking etc). Fasting teaches us to say 'NO!' to our nafs and inner desires. This helps us to develop taqwā, making it easier to restrain ourselves from ḥarām throughout the year.

Fasting is, therefore, a means of **training ourselves to obey Allah.**

When we become used to eating and drinking at the same time every day, our bodies start to crave food and drink when we pass that time (and often before!). By fasting, we wean our nafs off from what it is accustomed to, refusing to give in to its desires. Instead of allowing our nafs to control us, we control our nafs.

Shayṭān has access to us through two primary means:

- 1 **Shahawāt:** these are the **desires** and worldly attractions we experience, especially the desires of the private parts (lust) and the stomach (gluttony). Shahawāt are related to behaviour and actions.
- 2 **Shubuhāt:** these are **doubts** which we may experience, about the commandments of Allah, and perhaps even Allah Himself. Shubuhāt are related to īmān (belief) and knowledge.

When we fast, we reduce our intake of food and drink and have a tighter reign over our desires (shahawāt). This reduces Shayṭān's ability to attack us, and so we are less susceptible to falling prey to his whispers.

In this manner, we sin less, our hearts are purified, and we are able to clearly see the truth and submit to it more willingly. We become closer to our Creator, attaining genuine happiness and contentment, and advancing towards our eternal home. Allah says, "And as for those who feared standing before their Lord and **restrained themselves from (evil) desires**, Paradise will certainly be (their) home" (79:40-1).

The Objectives of Fasting

Fasting should help us to:

Attain taqwā (piety)

Develop control over our nafs

Increase our īmān in Allah

Increase our ṣabr

Develop ikhlāṣ (sincerity)

Increase our shukr to Allah

Increase our empathy for the poor

Increase zuhd (detachment from the world)

Purify our hearts

Remove toxins from the body

Reflect on our weakness

Marvel at Allah's greatness

Empty our hearts to consciously remember Allah

Beautify our character

Resist Shayṭān's attacks on us

The Secret of Fasting

Imām al-Ghazālī  explains the secret of fasting:

“The essence and secret of fasting is to **weaken the forces which are shayṭān’s means of leading one back to evil**. This can only happen if one reduces one’s intake of food, and only consumes what one would normally consume in the evening if he was not fasting...

...How will fasting help the individual overcome shayṭān and break one’s desires if he makes up at ifṭār time for what he missed out on eating throughout the day? And perhaps he **might even indulge in a variety of extra foods?**

It has even become the custom to stock up for Ramaḍān with all kinds of foods so that more is consumed during that time than in the course of several other months put together. It is well known that **the objective of fasting is to experience hunger and to break one’s desire, in order to strengthen the soul in attaining taqwā.**”

He goes on to explain that if the stomach is starved from morning till evening, and then at ifṭār time, is given delicacies till its fill, an adverse reaction will occur. **Even more desires of the individual will be stirred, much more than on an average day where the person was not even fasting.** Thus, rather than attaining the objective of fasting, we become more distant from it.

Similarly, he explains that one of the etiquettes of fasting is to avoid excessive sleeping during the day, so that one feels hunger and thirst.

Excessive food and intimacy cause the heart to become hard. It increases heedlessness and creates a barrier between the slave and the remembrance of Allah. On the other hand, an empty stomach softens and illuminates the heart. This makes it easier for us to remember Allah consciously.

If we overeat at ifṭār time, we're more likely to feel sleepy later on, and the night prayers will become difficult. More time may even be wasted in the bathroom.

Ramaḍān is the month of zuhd. Fasting was prescribed so that we reduce the amount of food we eat, and not increase it. **The purpose of Ramaḍān is to make us less attached to food, drink and our desires, and by doing so we realise the worthlessness of the world.** Ramaḍān should make us realise that our purpose in this life is not to eat, drink and fulfil our sexual desires. But rather these are means, to be used in moderation, in worshipping Allah ﷻ.

The 3 Levels of Fasting

1 Ordinary

- Abstaining from food, drink and intimacy.

2 Elite

- Protecting the **eyes** from looking at ḥarām & anything which takes you away from the remembrance of Allah.
- Protecting the **tongue** from lying, backbiting, arguing & foul language etc
- Protecting the **ears** from listening to ḥarām.
- Protecting the rest of your body from ḥarām
- **Not eating to your fill** at ifṭār time.
- **Hoping** that Allah will accept your fast, and at the same time **fearing** that your fast may not be accepted.

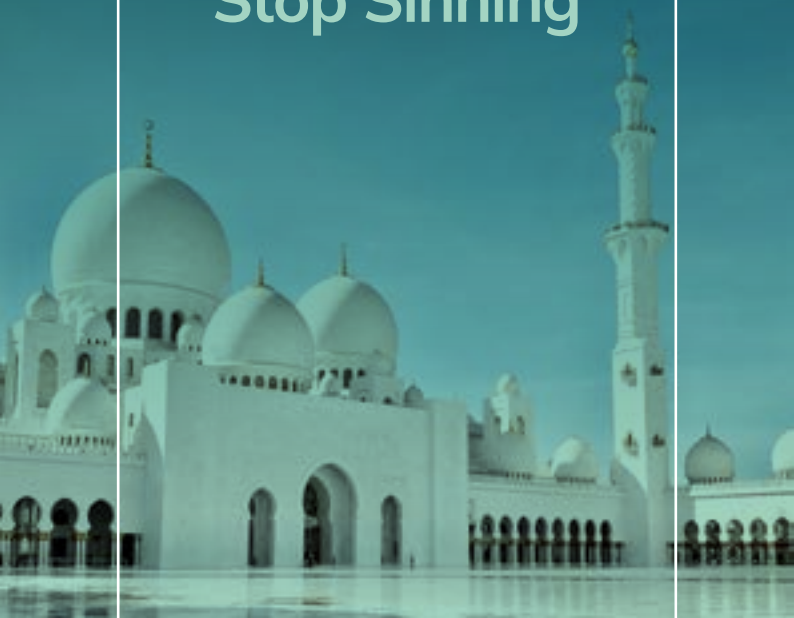
3 Super-Elite

- Abstaining from worldly thoughts & concerns, and everything other than Allah ﷻ

In conclusion, don't fast to lose weight, or because it's the current hype. Fast because **Allah** commanded you to do so. Fast so that you can attain His love. Fast so that you can truly worship Him, and not your 'inner desires'. Fast so that you can control your nafs, instead of letting it control you. Fast so that you can shield yourself from shayṭān and lust. Fast to become close to Allah. Fast **for** Allah.

— 3 —

Fasting & Sabr: A Training Programme to Stop Sinning



Our beloved Messenger ﷺ said, “Fasting is half of ṣabr” (Tirmidhī).

Ṣabr, often translated as **patience**, refers to holding back our reactions and being in control of our emotions, and to **persevere** in doing something we dislike, for the sake of Allah.

The reward of ṣabr is unique. Allah ﷻ informs us,

إِنَّمَا يُوفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

“Certainly, those who observe patience will be given their reward in full without measure” (39:10).

Like fasting, the reward of ṣabr has been left unspecified. It has been kept a surprise. This is because it is a difficult quality to attain. To persevere and not give up, to endure life’s difficulties without complaint and to continue struggling against all the odds is a trait of the great. It is as Allah described, one of the **“matters that require strong resolve”** (31:7).

Ṣabr is the path to attaining Allah’s forgiveness, mercy, and guidance. It is the secret to worldly and eternal success. It is the means of being protected from one’s enemies, and to becoming a role model for the believers. Ṣabr leads to one enjoying the **special companionship** (ma’iyyah) of Allah, and attaining His love.

There are three types of ṣabr:

- 1 Ṣabr in obeying Allah.
- 2 Ṣabr in staying away from sins.
- 3 Ṣabr in regards to the trials Allah has decreed.

Fasting combines the first two types. If we develop the first two types, it will become much easier for us to have ṣabr of the 3rd category when we face difficulties in our lives.

1 The 1st type of Sabr

The 1st type of ṣabr involves persevering and remaining steadfast on the commands of Allah. Throughout Ramaḍān, standing for long during the night prayers, spending long durations in the recitation of the Qur'ān, and i' tikāf in the masjid require ṣabr. Fasting for 20+ hours in certain countries, along with other life commitments, such as long hours at work, isn't always easy. Thus, enduring the hunger, thirst and fatigue for the sake of Allah develops ṣabr.

2 The 2nd type of Sabr

The second type of ṣabr is ṣabr on staying away from sins. Fasting especially, is designed to help us develop this type of ṣabr. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, **“Fasting is a shield from the Hell-fire”** (Tirmidhī). Fasting restrains lust and greed for food. Fasting also includes the ‘fasting’ of the tongue, eyes, ears etc. Controlling these impulses should make us less vulnerable to shayṭān and sinning. When this occurs, our hearts become purified, and we will inshāAllah be saved from the punishment of Allah ﷻ.

Fasting is a physical and spiritual detox: it removes the toxins from the body and the spiritual heart, allowing our bodies and souls to heal and become healthy. Fasting is a **training programme to help us stop sinning**, especially the sins of the tongue, and eyes:

The Tongue

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “There are many who fast, who gain nothing of their fast except hunger; and there are many who stand for the night prayer, who gain nothing of their prayer except sleeplessness” (Ibn Mājah).

This ḥadīth illustrates the wisdom behind fasting. It is not merely to give up food, drink and intimacy, but rather it is to be conscious of Allah in every action.

In order to protect ourselves from this warning, we should be extremely conscious of our tongues in Ramaḍān.

This includes:

- Backbiting and slandering
- Lying
- Foul language
- Saying hurtful things

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Whoever does not give up lying and false conduct, Allah has no need in him giving up his food and his drink” (Bukhārī).



“If you see hardness in your heart, weakness in your body, and deprivation in your livelihood, know that you have spoken about something that does not concern you!” – Mālik b. Dīnār 🕌

We should be conscious in our dealings, and we should make an active effort to stop cheating, being fraudulent in our dealings, and dealing with interest (ribā).


Ramaḍān is the perfect time to **cultivate our akhlāq** (good character), to develop self-restraint, and to control our tongues. The Prophet ﷺ taught us a method to use during our fasts: “When one of you wakes up fasting, he should neither use obscene language nor act ignorantly. If anyone insults him or argues with him, he should say: ‘I am fasting, I am fasting.’” (Muslim)




A man fasts from the pure and lawful, but he breaks his fast with the evil and unlawful: the flesh of his brother (i.e. ruins his fast by backbiting his brother).” – Yāḥyā b. Kathīr 🕌


Ramaḍān should train us to become **real** Muslims, as our beloved Prophet ﷺ said, “**The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the people are safe.**” (Nasā’ī)

Anger

‘Abdullāh b. al-Mubārak  was asked, “Summarise for us good character in one phrase.” He replied, “**Avoiding anger.**” Ramaḍān is the time to control our anger, and especially when we may be feeling irritable due to hunger (‘hangry’). If you feel angry, seek Allah’s protection from shayṭān, perform wuḍū, move away and control your tongue.

“ Tie up your anger with a ‘chain’ of forbearance. Anger is like a dog; if it is let loose, it will wreak havoc.”
– Ibn al-Qayyim 

The purpose of fasting is to attain taqwā: to train ourselves to stop sinning. Sometimes we may limit our understanding of worship and taqwā to something which is only between us and Allah. But what **fasting teaches us is that Allah takes the rights of His slaves very seriously.** If we violate the honour and rights of our fellow believers, our fasting becomes deficient, and may not be accepted to Allah. Hours and nights of worship can be reduced into nothing, and it may be due to just a minute of backbiting. The **nūr of fasting and qiyām** should become apparent in our daily lives, and especially in our interactions with our families, neighbours and colleagues.

“ Let there be an aura of tranquillity and dignity on the day of your fast. And don’t make the day when you fast the same as the day you don’t fast.”
– Jābir b. ‘Abdillāh 

The Eyes

We have to protect ourselves from all ḥarām, including looking at that which is ḥarām. This has become especially more important in our times, with the increase in shamelessness, easy access to ḥarām images and the normalisation of it. The eye is the entry point to our heart. What we look at affects our emotions, desires and thoughts. **Gazing at ḥarām gives shayṭān open access to our hearts.**

Ramaḍān is the time to delete/unfollow/end any ḥarām interactions with the opposite gender.

**Which category do you wish to belong to:
Angels, Devils or Animals?**

Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله explained that when the ṣabr of the human overcomes his lusts and desires, he joins the ranks of the angels. However, if his lusts and desires overcome his ṣabr, he joins the rank of the devils. And if his eating, drinking, and sexual intimacy overcome his ṣabr, he joins the rank of the animals.

Fasting: A Metaphor For Life

Fasting is a metaphor for life. Throughout the day, we experience hunger, thirst and tiredness. We experience difficulties for the sake of Allah. At the end of the day, we gladly eat and say,

ذَهَبَ الظَّمْأُ ، وَابْتَلَّتِ الْعُرُوقُ ، وَتَبَّتِ الْأَجْرُ إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ

“The thirst has gone, the veins have been moistened, and the reward has been secured, if Allah wills.”

Likewise, throughout our lives **we should undergo struggle and difficulties in seeking knowledge, establishing the dīn of Allah on His earth, and staying away from the ḥarām.** And at the time of death, we hope that we will also figuratively say, “The thirst has gone, the veins have been moistened, and the reward has been secured, if Allah wills.” The difficulties have come to an end, and we hope for a great reward by Allah, al-‘Azīm (The Magnificent).

— 4 —

Fasting & Shukr: The Blessing of Iftar and Suhur



Half of īmān is **ṣabr**: patience and perseverance. The other half is **shukr**: gratitude. Just as fasting teaches us ṣabr, it also helps us to cultivate shukr.

Throughout the day, whenever our stomachs growl from hunger, we should **consciously remember and thank the One who provides us with every morsel of food, and every drop of water**: Allah al-Qayyūm (The All-Sustainer).

We only appreciate the blessing of something when it is taken away from us. As people whose bellies are always full, we rarely experience hunger, and thus **we fail to appreciate the magnitude of Allah's blessings in a single slice of bread, let alone a myriad of delicacies!** Thus, when we fast, and stay away from food, drink and lawful intimacy, we realise the blessings Allah has bestowed upon us. Not only does He give us these blessings, He has made them ḥalāl for us, and moreover when consumed with the **correct intention, He actually rewards us for pleurably partaking in them.** This should fill our hearts with gratitude to Him.

Shukr consists of three elements:

1. To thank Allah by acknowledging His favours and praising Him with our **tongues**.
2. To thank Him by **humbling our hearts** to Him.
3. To thank Him with our bodies by using all of our **body parts to obey Him**.

We should thank Allah for our health, security, wealth, and children. And the **greatest blessing we should thank Him for is īman and guidance**. At the end of the verse about fasting, Allah says:

وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

"...So that you may complete the prescribed period and proclaim the greatness of Allah for guiding you, and that you may be grateful" (2:185).

Shukr itself is one of Allah's greatest blessings, as shukr leads to even more blessings:

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

"And (remember) when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more (14:7)'".

If we seek to be blessed with the **ability to do more good deeds** and stay **firm** in worshipping Allah, the key to this is shukr.

We should thank Allah, especially, for blessing us with Ramaḍān: for **allowing us to fast**, whilst many of His servants do not do so; and for **granting us the gift of qiyām and the Qur'ān**, whilst many of His creation are deprived of it.

We should thank Allah for making Ramaḍān a month in which deeds are multiplied, sins are forgiven and du'ās are accepted. We should thank Him for chaining the rebellious devils, opening the doors of Paradise and closing the doors

of the Hell-fire. And one of the greatest blessings **we should thank Him for is that He has exclusively designated fasting for Himself and He will personally reward us for it:** 'Fasting is for Me and I will (personally) reward it' (Muslim).

The Joys of Iftar

You've had a long day at work, or maybe the kids have been driving you over the bend. It's hot. You're hungry and thirsty. Even the food your co-workers are eating suddenly seems so appetising. A few hours later, and the smell wafting from the kitchen is making your stomach growl.

And then it's time for ifṭār. Allāhu Akbar! Who doesn't experience happiness at the time of ifṭār?

Our beloved Messenger ﷺ said, "The fasting person will have **two** moments of joy: one when he opens his fast, and **the other when he will meet his Lord**" (Muslim).



At the time of ifṭār, we feel **happy and grateful** at being given the opportunity and the ability to complete an incredible act of worship (fasting). We feel happy at being able to lawfully eat and drink once again.


The Prophet ﷺ then reminds us that even though ifṭār fills us with happiness, there is an even greater source of happiness waiting for us in the next world.

It is from the sunnah of our beloved ﷺ to eat ifṭār early.

He ﷺ said, "The people will remain well as long as they hasten the opening of the fast" (Bukhārī).

Iftār, just like fasting, teaches us obedience and taqwā. Throughout the day we give up on our desires, **in obedience** to Allah and to try to become closer to Him. And as the sun sets, we rush to eat in obedience to Allah and to try to become closer to Him. **The timing is His, and not ours.** We stop eating for Him, and we start eating for Him. In both cases, it is because **He** – Majestic and Exalted is He – has commanded us to do so.

We should open our fast with **dates**. Anas  said, “The Messenger of Allah  used to open his fast with some fresh dates before he prayed. If there were no fresh dates, then with some dry dates. If there were no (dry dates), then he would drink a few sips of water” (Abū Dāwūd).

We should take great care to avoid overeating at ifṭār time. The Prophet  said, “**The son of Adam fills no vessel worse than his stomach.** It is sufficient for him to eat what will support his back. But if he must (fill his stomach), then only a third (of its capacity) is for food, a third for drink and a third left (empty) for breathing” (Tirmidhī).

Some of the pious people of the past would eat a very light ifṭār, and then eat their main meal at suḥūr, so that they could stand the night in worshipping Allah. Excessive food makes us sleepy and lethargic, and we are more likely to struggle with standing up in qiyām.

Likewise, we should eat **nutritious**, and **ḥalāl** food. Food which has not only been slaughtered in the ḥalāl way, but which has also been earned from a **ḥalāl income**. We should try to eat food which is pure and wholesome, for which

animals have not been tortured or kept under oppressive conditions. Fried and fatty foods should also be avoided. Along with harming us, it will increase our thirst. If fasting and Ramaḍān is a 30-day spiritual detox, then it is also a physical detox. But this will only happen if we carefully observe what we eat and drink.

Once we finish eating, we should **thank** Allah and praise Him with the words of our beloved Prophet ﷺ.

“ The Prophet ﷺ said, “Indeed Allah is pleased with the servant who praises Him when he eats, and praises Him when he drinks” (Muslim)

Suḥur: A Blessed Meal

The second meal for the believer in Ramaḍān is suḥūr/sehri.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “There is blessing in eating suḥūr; so, do not skip it, even if one of you has a sip of water. For indeed **Allah and His Angels send blessings and mercy on those who eat suḥūr**” (Aḥmad).

“ The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Eat suḥūr, for indeed there is blessing in it” (Bukhārī).

Suḥūr is blessed because it is a sunnah, and there is blessing in every single sunnah of our beloved ﷺ. Ibn Ḥajar رحمه الله explains that through suḥur, we distinguish ourselves from the People of the Book. Suḥur gives us **strength** to worship Allah, increases our energy levels, and protects us from a bad attitude and poor character that may arise from hunger ('hangry').

Likewise, suḥūr allows us to give **charity** to anyone who asks for it at that time, and allows us to share our meal at this time with the needy. Suḥūr is a fool proof method of **ensuring we stand for Allah and supplicate to Him in the last part of the night**. Another advantage of suḥūr is that it allows us to make an intention of fasting if we had forgotten to do so before sleeping.

We should try to eat at least one date for suḥūr. Our beloved Prophet ﷺ said, **“How excellent are dates as the believer’s suḥūr”** (Abū Dāwūd).

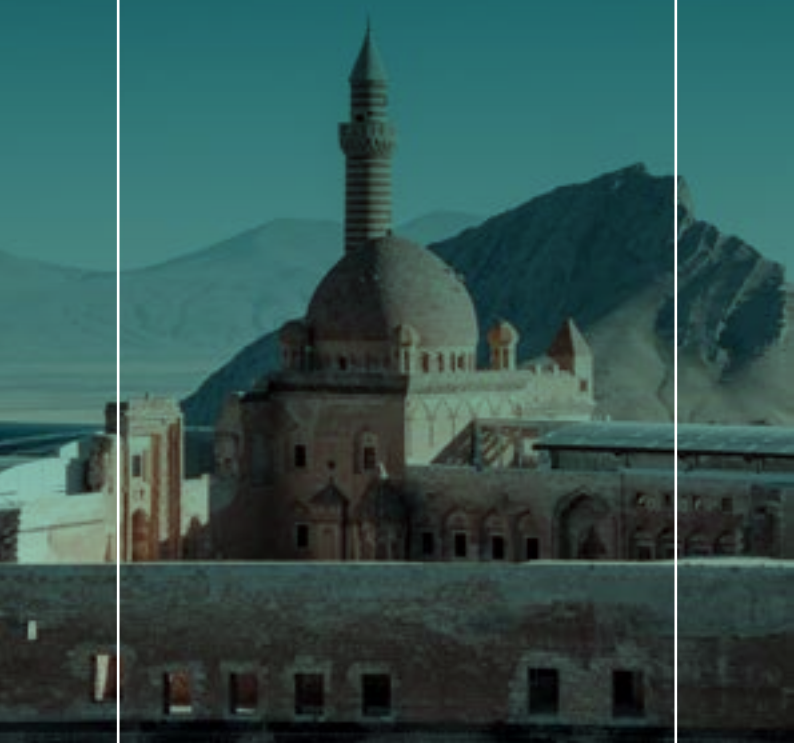
Just like iḥṭār, we should eat nutritious food and drink plenty of water. Slow-release energy foods are also beneficial to keep us going throughout the day.

“ The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “When Allah grants a blessing to a slave, upon which the slave praises Him, the praise of the slave is better than the blessing itself.” (Ibn Mājah)

May Allah al-Shakūr (The Most Appreciative) make us from His grateful servants, and may He bestow upon us the two moments of joy: the joy of iḥṭār, and the joy of meeting Him and beholding His Noble Face.

— 5 —

Fasting & Ikhlas



Allah ﷻ says in the Noble Qur'ān,

قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْبُدُ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ دِينِي

“Say, “It is (only) Allah that I worship, being sincere in my devotion to Him” (39:14).

Ikhhlāṣ is the foundation of our dīn. Ikhhlāṣ, often translated as sincerity, refers to **doing everything solely for the sake of Allah**. Ikhhlāṣ is when you don't wish for someone other than Allah to see your actions, and you don't wish for someone other than Him to reward you for them.

Fasting teaches us the meaning of ikhlāṣ (sincerity). The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Every action of the son of Ādam is multiplied: a good deed receiving a tenfold to seven hundredfold rewards. Allah the Mighty and Exalted has said: ‘Except for fasting. **It is for Me** and I will (personally) reward it; he abandons his desires and food for My sake.’ The fasting person will have two moments of joy: one when he opens his fast, and the other when he will meet his Lord. The unpleasant smell coming out of his mouth is more fragrant to Allah than musk” (Muslim).

How Does Fasting Help Us To Attain Ikhlas

From all actions, fasting is solely for Allah al-Aḥad (The One). The slave stays away from eating, drinking and fulfilling his desires only for the sake of Allah. He stays away from what he loves in order to gain the pleasure of Allah. Fasting is not

something you actively do, but it is what you do **not** do (i.e. no eating, drinking and intimacy). No one else can ever be 100% certain if you are fasting, or if you may have broken your fast in secret. This is something only Allah fully knows.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ quoting Prophet Yaḥyā ؑ said, “And I command you to fast. Indeed, the similitude of (fasting) is a man carrying a pouch of musk in a crowd of people, all of them marvelling at its fragrance. Indeed, the breath of the fasting person is more fragrant to Allah than the scent of musk” (Tirmidhī).

Ibn al-Qayyim ؒ explains that in this ḥadīth, the Prophet ﷺ used the image of someone carrying a pouch of musk concealed from view, hidden under his garments, as was the habit of those who carry musk. Fasting is, likewise, hidden from the eyes of men and unperceived by their senses.

Each time your stomach growls, you could easily eat without another human being knowing. However, you stop yourself from doing so, because you are aware that Allah is watching you. This presence of the heart and watchful awareness (known as ‘murāqabah’) leads to **iḥsān**, the pinnacle of our relationship with Allah ﷻ. Iḥsān is, as our beloved ﷺ described, “That you worship Allah as though you are seeing Him; for if you cannot see Him, He truly sees you” (Muslim).

Ramadan: Training to Develop Ikhlas in All Aspects of Life

As fasting helps us to develop ikhlāṣ, this should trickle down to other parts of our lives. It should help us to renew sincerity, especially in those deeds where it is more likely for our intentions to become muddled.

“ The believer who is sincere to Allah is the happiest, most content, blessed and peaceful of all people. And this is an early paradise before the upcoming Paradise.” – Ibn al-Qayyim 🕌

Be Vigilant About Your Intention

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Actions are according to intentions” (Bukhārī). Before we begin our good deeds, we should rectify our intentions and only intend the pleasure of Allah. **The stronger and purer the intention is, the greater the reward will be.** A sincere intention can cause a pound donated in charity to become the equivalent of donating a thousand pounds. ‘Abdullāh b. al-Mubārak 🕌 said, “How many a small act is elevated by an intention, and how many a great act is diminished by an intention.”

Similarly, an intention can transform an ordinary permissible action (e.g. eating) into an act of worship. Our beloved Prophet ﷺ said, “Indeed you do not spend anything **seeking the pleasure of Allah**, except that you will be rewarded for it, including what you place in your wife’s mouth” (Bukhārī).

It is very easy to start a deed with sincere intentions, but then find half way through the deed that we are not doing it only for the sake of Allah. Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “I have never dealt with anything more difficult than my intention; it keeps changing on me.” Sahl al-Tustarī ؓ was asked, “What is the most difficult thing for the nafs to attain?” He replied, “Ikhlāṣ, because it (i.e. the nafs) does not get anything out of it.” Thus, we should constantly renew our intentions. We should be conscious of our intentions **before** we do a good deed, **during** it, and **after** it.

“**Indeed your actions are few, so make the few that you have sincere.**” – Maymūn b. Mahrān ؓ

What is your secret deed?

For years, the poor of Madinah would find food left on their doorsteps. They only found out who the ‘mystery’ donor was the day he passed away. It was none other than the great grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, Zayn al-‘Abidīn ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn. When they bathed him, they saw marks on his back and shoulders due to him personally carrying the provisions to the home of the poor.

One of the **most effective ways of building sincerity is to perform good deeds in secret**, and inform nobody about them thereafter, not even in passing. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Whoever amongst you is able to have hidden good deeds, then let him do so” (Musannaf b. Abī Shaybah).

Ibn al-Jawzī رحمه الله wrote, “How few are those who purely dedicate their good deeds to Allah, glory be to Him! Most people like their acts of worship to be known. Sufyān al-Thawrī رحمه الله used to say, ‘I have never relied on my public good deeds.’” ‘Abdullāh b. al-Mubārak رحمه الله said, “Whoever wishes to see the Face of his Creator (in Paradise), let him do good deeds and not inform anyone about them.”

“**Action without sincerity and without confirming to the Sunnah is like a traveller who carries sand in his bag: carrying it burdens him and does not benefit him.**” – Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله

Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī رحمه الله would stand the entire night in prayer. In the morning, he would raise his voice, making it out as though he had just woken up at that moment.

The wife of Ḥassān b. Sinān رحمه الله said that her husband would come and lie next to her and then try to fool her as the mother tries to fool her child. When he would see that she had fallen asleep, he would slip out of bed. He would then stand and pray. She says, “I said to him: ‘O Abū ‘Abd-Allah! How much will you torture yourself? Go easy on yourself.’ He replied: ‘Woe to you! Remain silent, for am I about to sleep, from which I will not awaken for a long time (i.e. sleep in the grave).’”



The one who is sincere to his Lord is like the one who walks on sand. You don't hear his footsteps, but you see his footprints (i.e. the impact of his deeds).” – ‘Abdullāh b. Mas‘ūd 🕌

Dāwūd b. Abī Hind 🕌 fasted for an entire year, without his family knowing. He was a cloth merchant, and he would take his lunch with him to the market. On the way, he would give his lunch to the poor, and when he would return in the evening, he would eat with his family. His fellow merchants would think he ate at home, and his family would think that he ate in the market.

Allāhu Akbar! Imagine fasting for an entire year without your own family knowing!

Ramaḍān is the perfect time to collect these ‘secret deeds’.

It may be additional night prayers, or charity, or helping someone. No doubt we will see the effects of such deeds in our lives, and we can only imagine the reward in the hereafter.

Imām al-Shāfi‘ī 🕌 said, “(Imām) Mālik 🕌 said to me: ‘Muḥammad, fear Allah! When you are alone with Allah and you perform a good deed, then beware that anyone finds out about it. For Allah 🕌 only accepts that which is sincerely for His pleasure, as He said: Everything is going to perish except His Face (28:88) i.e. that which is done seeking His pleasure. Adhere to the station of knowledge, as it is attached to the station of Prophethood. This is what Rabī‘ah b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān related to me.’ Then Mālik wept, and caused me to weep. I then realised that Allah did not elevate the status of Mālik, except through a secret which was between him and Allah.”

“Whoever would like to have peace in his heart, and be saved from the agonies of death and the terrors of the Day of Judgement, then let his private deeds be greater than his public ones.” – Imām Mālik 🕌

Riya

The opposite of ikhlāṣ is riyā (showing off/ostentation) and sum‘ah (seeking fame), both **diseases of the heart**. In an era of social media and constant ‘sharing’, we are more susceptible to riyā, as we focus on impressing the watchful gaze of our followers instead of being watchful of the Gaze of Allah, al-Muhaymin (The Vigilant). Likewise, if we are involved in seeking knowledge (‘ilm) and spreading the message of Islam (da‘wah), we are **more vulnerable** to shayṭān’s attempts to pollute our efforts with riyā. Thus, we should constantly guard and renew our intentions.

Reflect:

- Do I sometimes mention my good deeds – which could easily be kept as a secret – casually in passing, in conversation?
- Do I yearn for praise from others? Do I curate my social media profiles and status so that people hold a certain image of me?
- What ordinary everyday actions can I transform into actions of worship, by consciously changing my intention?

Let us end with
the supplication of
'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَمَلِيْ كُلُّهُ صَالِحًا
وَّاجْعَلْهُ لِرَوْحِكَ خَالِصًا وَلَا
تَجْعَلْ لِاَحَدٍ فِيْهِ شَيْئًا

O Allah, make all of my deeds
righteous, and make them purely for
Your sake; and do not let there be a
share for anyone else in them.

Fasting: A Unique Reward

Our beloved Messenger ﷺ said,
“The fasting person will have two moments of joy: one when he opens his fast, and the other when he will meet his Lord.”
(Muslim)

If we fast properly, with all its conditions and etiquettes, then Allah will be happy to meet us, and we will be happy to meet Him inshāAllah. And there is no greater happiness than this. Fasting is a unique act of worship, which has a unique reward: an undisclosed reward which Allah will personally give to His servants, as they stroll into Paradise through the Gate of al-Rayyān.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:
“Indeed, there is a gate in Paradise called al-Rayyān. Those who fasted will enter through it on the Day of Judgement. No one else will enter through it along with them. It will be said: ‘Where are those who fasted?’ Then they will get up, and there will be none other than them to enter through it. Once they have all entered, it will be closed and no one else will enter through it.”
(Bukhārī)

المؤمنين

يَأْتِيَهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ، أَرْجِعِي
إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً ، فَادْخُلِي
فِي عِبَادِي ، وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

(It will be said to the righteous,)
“O tranquil soul! Return to your
Lord, well pleased (with Him) and
well pleasing (to Him). So join My
servants, and enter My Paradise.”
(89:27- 30)



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