

Ramadan Booster – reflections on an extraordinary month



Some people never benefit from *Ramadan*. This is a shame, because in *Ramadan* there is a lot on offer and to maximise our gain from it, we need to be ready for it before it starts, not part way through.

Though *siyyam* (fasting) has been prescribed on all nations before us, *Ramadan* is a gift given to our *ummah* exclusively. No other nation before us was given this month. It is a truly blessed time.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) prepared for *Ramadan* well before it started and when Usama bin Zayd asked him why he fasted in *Sha'ban* more than any other month (apart from *Ramadan*), he replied, because people are heedless of this month. And it is a month where our deeds will be presented to the Lord of the worlds and I would like to include in my deeds *Siyam*.

His aim (peace be upon him) was to enter *Ramadan* already in *dhikr*-mode (remembrance mode), not *ghafila*-mode (heedless-mode).

Our deeds are presented to Allah Almighty in *Sha'ban* so we need to perfect it. It is our OFSTED inspection or accounts' audit. Before an inspection, we get all our books in order. If we are not ready, our inspection report could be shambolic. With preparation, we can aim for Outstanding. So we need to build momentum for *Ramadan* in *Sha'ban*. Then we can hit *Ramadan* running *inshallah*.

How do we fight *ghafila*? By being in a state of remembrance.

The remembrance needs to be practical as well as verbal.

- We need to increase our *khushoo* in *salah*
- We need to control our limbs
- We need to observe our thoughts, words and deeds

When we assess our deeds, we tend to gloss over the bad ones and glorify the good ones, but we need to be more critical in our appraisal. When we analyse ourselves, we need the same level of scrutiny as an external examiner.

- **Connection – the ultimate signal boost, yours for 30 days only**

If we don't have a mobile phone signal we can't connect. In order to provide a clear signal, mobile phone masts are strategically located on higher places. Sometimes our connection is weak and we blame the signal. In fact it is not our signal that is weak but our equipment that is faulty! It is human nature that we blame someone else for the problem that is actually our own making. Over the year we get so caught up in work that we get stuck in a corner and somewhat deluded about how things are going in our life. If we want to get back on track and re-connected with Allah Almighty, Allah has facilitated it in this special month. In *Ramadan* we have the chance to boost our connection with Allah Almighty through an extra strong signal. Allah has favored certain times, places and people over others. Just as *Makkah* has a mega-strong signal and gaining *khushoo* tranquility in *salah* is easier there, connection booms in *Ramadan*. *Ramadan* is the single biggest signal boost in the year. If we can achieve a good connection in *Ramadan* we can have a strong signal the rest of the year too. We can pray to Allah Almighty to give us more focus in our *salah* and we can achieve it by having purity in our intention. Concentration does not parachute down on us, rather we have to seek it.

'Indeed your lord throughout the days of your life has gifts. He showers them on those who seek them.' (Narrated by Tabarani).

- **Communication – Remind me who are you again?**

Social media has made us even more disconnected from each other than ever. Even while present in the same room, we are separated from each other in our virtual worlds, absorbed by our handheld devices. Husbands and wives send messages to each other instead of talking. Islam is a social religion - a religion of connecting with others, particularly our families and friends and neighbours. They have rights over us. In *Ramadan* we can reconnect with them over *iftaar*, sitting and eating, chatting and worshipping together.

- **Transformation – The New You!**

Ramadan gives us a chance to shed bad habits and adopt good ones. Whether it is smoking, gossiping or being grumpy, this month offers the chance to permanently change ourselves. *Ramadan* enables change because it shakes up our routines – taking us out of well-worn patterns of behaviour that we have comfortably and unthinkingly fallen into all year round. Out goes the all night sleep, three meals, endless snacks or coffees, and in comes levels of self-control we might struggle to attain at other times of the year. Eating *suhoor* in *Ramadan* forces us to wake at the time during which Allah loves us to wake up and ask for His blessings and forgiveness. Though we wake up to

feed our stomachs, it is the best time to feed our souls. Allah is offering us spiritual nourishment that is better than *suhoor*.

'In the last third of every night our *Rabb* (Cherisher and Sustainer) (Allah descends to the lowermost heaven and says; "Who is calling Me, so that I may answer him? Who is asking Me so that may I grant him? Who is seeking forgiveness from Me so that I may forgive him?'" (Bukhari)

As we will have woken at this time daily for a month, there is no reason why we cannot continue rising at this time all year round. Studies have shown that it takes between twenty to forty days to kick a habit so doing something for thirty days helps us achieve changes to habits that we may have struggled to break at other times. Allah Almighty gives us the chance to change our selves into better people - to do it and move on. Do your best to change yourself.

- **Purification** – spring clean your soul

Ramadan is the time to purify our heart, intentions, deeds, conduct, and wealth. Allah helps us compensate for shortcomings in our *siyyam* through paying *fitra* as well as simultaneously helping the needy. *Infaq* (spending) is linked directly to *iman*. If we have been wasting money, it is time to reign ourselves in. If we have been a bit stingy, it's time to open our wallets. He has given huge incentives to us to spend in Ramadan when the rewards for good deeds are multiplied by seventy. Allah speaks fondly in the Quran of the ones that give generously in charity, whether it is obligatory or optional. They get past the delusion that their money is theirs by their own efforts, and recognise instead that our wealth is not ours, but a gift from Allah in the first place, and that we have to give some of it back.

- **Balance**

While the material dominates the spiritual all year round, *Ramadan* redresses the balance by allowing the spiritual to lead the way over the physical. Our system is turned inside out. Instead we fulfil the needs of our soul during the day and the needs of our body during the night. During the month, we are given full control over our desires in the most extended and effective course of self-denial. It is no coincidence that Allah mentions the line 'I am very close to you' in the lines related to fasting in Surah Baqarah. All forms of *ibadah* involve a certain degree of asceticism because whenever we desire worldly things, we move further away from Allah Almighty. Thus during *salah* we are prohibited from eating or indulging in any other activity, during *hajj* we are prohibited from marital relations, and during *Ramadan* we must refrain from fulfilling our appetites for food or intercourse during daylight hours. The less our desires control us, the closer we draw to Allah Almighty and the more un-enlaved we become to our desires. In this way we also balance *dunya* with *akhira*, so that we don't give disproportionate importance to one over the other with disastrous outcomes. If we have been chasing *dunya* all year round, *Ramadan* is our reality check. It's time for our soul to have its MOT.

- **Control**

Ramadan is a month of fasting not feasting. Food should be simple, it is not a time for improving our culinary skills. We shouldn't over-eat once the fast is over, nor should we go back to overindulging once the month is over. We should carry this self-discipline into our lives, so that we look after our health and don't crush the needs of our soul at the expense of our body.

It's not just in *Ramadan* that we say 'I'm fasting' when we are provoked. We can be in this mode all year round. We can refrain from what will cause us regret and what is haram by controlling our whims, eyes, tongues, hands and feet through the year. The best on the day of judgement will be the one with the best character. Not the best at cooking, dress or beard.

Ramadan is not for men only. Men should give their wives a break. If they can buy food in especially in the last ten days, then let women boost their spirituality too, rather than spending hours in the kitchen while the husband is in *itikaaf* or has invited lots of guests over to get the reward of feeding them. After all, it's her *Ramadan* too. So be considerate to one another and focus on what's important.

Let us be better husbands, wives, children, and siblings to one another.

Seek forgiveness from those whom you have wronged. Start a new page with Allah Almighty so you can meet Him with a clean, open heart.

We have the dua: 'O Allah prepare us for Ramadan and make us close to you.'

Don't dismiss fasting because you are scared you won't be able to do it. Tap into hidden abilities that you didn't know you had, discover spiritual and physical resources that you didn't know were there but that Allah Almighty put in your system. Don't give up before trying! Don't give your verdict before even attempting it. First try, and then decide.