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**Ramadan: A Global Season of
Worship and Good Deeds**

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

All these things have made Ramadan a global season and a time of grand celebration of worship, God-remembrance, recitation of the Quran, self-restraint, and piety in which Muslims—educated and uneducated, rich and poor, humble and privileged-participate like close friends and associates all over the world. Ramadan falls at the same time in every city and village in the world. Its arrival can be noticed equally in the palaces of the rich as well as huts of the poor. No one can dare do its rituals differently according to his personal understanding, nor is there any scope for a disagreement in determining the number of its days. The grandeur and beauty of Ramadan is, in fact, easily noticeable throughout the length and breadth of the Muslim world. It seems as if a canopy of effulgence and peace is raised all over the Muslim society. Even those who are slack in Fasting choose to fast in Ramadan for the fear of being alienated in the Muslim community. If for some reason they decide not to fast, they eat in the day hiding from others in shame. The sick and the traveller are, of course, lawfully exempted from Fasting. Fasting is thus observed collectively throughout the world in the same month. This creates a congenial and conducive atmosphere for the believers due to which Fasting becomes easy, hearts soften, and Muslims turn to deeds of worship and submission, sympathy and compassion with greater eagerness. ■

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Wisdom of Qur'an

O Believers! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become pious.

(al-Baqarah 2:183)

The above Qur'anic verse lays down that fasting is a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims. Until the Last Day the command embodied in this verse remains valid. Embedded in the verse is thus much food for thought.

First, the command is addressed to believers. For the command involves doing something which is difficult. It calls for courage and patience to fast. Accordingly, mention is made first of faith. The believers are asked to discharge this duty. For they have entered into a covenant with God to obey His commands. They have pledged their servitude to Him, affirming that He is the Master and Ruler. They are bound to abide by His commands, irrespective of their self-interest.

For they are obliged to perform whatever He commands of them. This is because of their servitude to Him. Being His servants they are expected to behave thus. They are at His beck and call. Allah being All-Wise begins the command in the above fashion. Otherwise, secular laws are promulgated without any reference to one's gain or safety against some loss. Although Allah is the absolute Ruler, Creator of the heavens and earth who exercises total control over everyone's life, honour and property, He invokes the conviction of believers. Muslims are exhorted to act on the dictates of their faith. They are expected to respond vigorously and positively to His call. Against this backdrop they are told that a month-long fasting is prescribed for them as a religious duty. ■

Pearls From the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)

(1) *Abu Hurairah relates that the Apostle of God said: No believing man hates his believing wife. If there is a bad quality in her, there will, also, be a good quality. "*

- Muslim

Commentary: It tells that if a man disliked his wife for some reason, he should not adopt an attitude of hatred or indifference towards her and start thinking in terms of divorce, but look for the good qualities in her and learn to admire her because of them. This is the claim of Faith on a believing husband and the privilege of a believing wife, As the Quran says: *' But consort with them in kindness, for if ye hate them it may happen that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good.'* - (IV:19).

(2) *It is related by Ayesha that the Apostle of God said: "Among Muslims his Faith is more perfect whose behaviour towards (everyone) is good, and, (particularly) towards his wife is of love and kindness."*

- Tirmizi

(3) *It is related by Ayesha that the Apostle of God said: "Good among you are those who are good to their wives; and I, (on my part), am very good to my wives."*

- Tirmizi

Commentary: It shows that a special mark of goodness is that a man treated his wife lovingly and well. To make the advice more effective for the Muslims, the Prophet added that, by the grace of God, he was most kind and considerate to his wives himself. The attitude of the sacred Prophet towards his wives was perfect, indeed, a few examples of which are contained in the narratives given below. ■

Editor's Note 

Advent of Ramadan

It is said that underlying significance and aims and virtues of the four fundamental duties of Islam, Namaz, Zakat, Saum (fasting) and Haj should be clearly understood by believers. Each one of these has its own significance and their cumulative observance and practice make a person perfect Muslim.

Salat or Namaz is ordained to be observed as a regular worship and should be offered five times a day as prescribed in Tradition. Zakat that is poor's due is obligatory on those who possess wealth more than their own requirements. Similarly Haj that is pilgrimage to Mecca is must for those who are financially and physically sound. The Saum that is fasting is obligatory for a month in a year.

Imam Ghazali shedding light on the objects of fasting , writes :

“The object of fasting is that man should produce within him a semblance of the Divine Attribute of Samadiyat (i. e., Freedom from want), that he should, as far as possible, take after the angels and cast off the beastly propensities because the angels are free from desire and the place of man, too, is above the animals and he has, further, been given the power of discrimination to resist the pressure of inordinate appetites. He is, of course, inferior to angels in the sense that desire often overpowers him and he has to strive hard to subdue it. When he conquers them attains the dizzy heights of the heavenly host and begins to dwell on the plane of the angels”.

Similarly, Allama Ibn-i-Qaiyyim says:

“The purpose of fasting is that the spirit of man was released from the clutches of desire and moderation prevailed in his carnal self and through it, he realised the goal of purification and everlasting felicity. It is aimed at curtailing the intensity of desire and lust by means of hunger and thirst, at inducing man to realise how many were there in the world like him who had to go even without a small quantity of food, at making it

difficult for the Devil to deceive him, and at restraining his organs from turning towards things in which there was the loss of both the worlds. Fasting thus is the bridle of the God-fearing, the shield of the crusaders and the discipline of the virtuous.”

Proceeding further the Allama remarks:

“Fasting is most efficacious in the protection of the external limbs and internal organs. It guards against disorders resulting from the accumulation of the effete matter. It expels the toxins that are injurious to health and cures the ailments which develop in the body due to over-indulgence. It is beneficial for health and most helpful in leading a life of piety and good-doing.

“Says the Quran :

O ye who believe: Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before ye, that ye may ward off evil. (– ii : 183)

“And the holy Prophet has said: Fasting is a shield.”

“Hence, a person who wishes to marry but does not have the means to support a family is advised to observe fasting. It has been prescribed as a sovereign remedy for him, the object being to demonstrate that since the advantages of fasting were evident from the point of view of commonsense God had enjoined it as an act of mercy for the protection of His slaves”.

Considering the importance and virtues of the Ramadan fasting we expect that every Muslim, as in the past, this year too will observe this obligation. ■

S.A.

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Defending Faith

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

O believers! Endure and be patient. Guard your territory by stationing army units permanently at the places from where the enemy can attack you. And fear Allah so that you may be successful.

(Al 'Imran 3:200)

Allah directs believers to bear with their condition by way of creating an ambience of perseverance, urging one another to be patient. Another directive is to defend their frontiers. This is rounded off with an exhortation of God consciousness. They should do everything in the realisation that Allah is omnipotent and All-Seeing. This will help them achieve success.

The first and foremost directive is patience. It is in the form of a command with which the address opens. Believers are asked to persevere. The Arabic expression *sabr* has changed its connotations over a long period of time. In Urdu, it has assumed yet more connotations. Furthermore, it is used in Urdu in a very narrow, restricted sense. Generally speaking, it is taken to mean that one should put up with a calamity, an injustice, pain or suffering, without complaint. In the original Arabic, however, *sabr* carries a wider range of meaning. It stands for constancy, consistency, an unwavering resolve and taking an uncompromising stand on one's principles.

In the above passage believers are asked both to be patient and to act with perseverance. These twin directives are worth studying. Patience alone does not suffice for communities in their struggle. Rather, there is a need for an atmosphere of perseverance, constancy, boldness and courage. This should characterise community life. Every individual should reinforce the other to be patient and persevering. A believer's entire way of life, his conviction, his perseverance, his ambition and resolve, his excellent conduct and his behaviour should be such as to boost others' morale and be a guide for everyone. His illustrious example should be a source of strength and inspiration for others. He should motivate the weak-hearted, exhorting them to take a firm stand. In sum, the ambience should be such that one should find it difficult to demoralise others. Any lack of spirit should be widely condemned. On being faced with doubt and scepticism, every believer should encourage others to adopt a firm stance.

The believers are told emphatically in the above passage to be patient. It is evident from Arabic idiom that the Qur'anic expression used in this passage signifies one's personal conduct. The other expression is, however, related to the community as a whole. In other words, believers should be patient in their

personal lives. At another level, they should urge perseverance, display the utmost endurance and tolerance and face situations courageously and in a manly fashion. Such a stance posits no weakness.

The believers should be consistent in their faith, beliefs and trust in Allah, and take only Him as the All-Powerful. They are instructed to create an ambience of perseverance. Their conduct at both personal and collective levels should display their ability to endure and persevere. The believing community should stand out above others for its perseverance. It should infuse others with a great power of resistance. For some strategic reason or while looking for divine help or in the larger interests of community and country this community may defer taking a decisive step. Yet it will strike later when the time is right. Yet this does not amount to any weakness on its part. Rather, all believers should be full of perseverance. They should impart the impression that they possess tremendous powers of resistance. They should be ready to take on their enemies, both from within and without. Notwithstanding their desire to wage a decisive battle, they must also exercise self-restraint in the public interest. They reckon with what suits their country. They are equally aware of the rights and interests of their neighbours. The evil emanating from violence and bloodshed prevents them from taking up arms. They are checked by their faith, their moral training and the role model provided

by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and his Companions. Otherwise they would immediately plunge into the thick of the battlefield. They have tremendous capacity for action. History bears testimony that minority groups have often been successful. They can destroy country upon country, reducing vast empires to nothing more than rubble.

The Qur'anic directive, nonetheless, is that they should do only that which is best for the community as a whole. The believers are guided in every respect by the Prophet's sayings and his Sunnah, Believers do not have absolute freedom to act as they like. Nor are they expected to act impulsively, provoked by the course of events. It is befitting for them instead to take steps in a controlled, self-restrained and wise way. They should take into consideration all the factors before committing themselves to action.

It is the miracle of the Qur'an that the import of the passage under discussion appears to be addressed in particular to the Indian Muslims of our time. We are directed to be patient, persevere, and act with steadfastness even in the face of the communal carnage, frequent attacks, violence and bloodshed directed against us and all the injustice and apathy shown to us.

More importantly, we are instructed to defend our frontiers. The Qur'an uses the expression *ribat* which refers to a safe habitation. Believers are exhorted to live

together in unity, giving the ambience of an invincible fortress to the enemy. They are to defend themselves against the enemy. What follows this is the best piece of advice one can obtain: "Fear Allah". This sets apart the directive from the comments of any military or political leader. A statesman or politician may, at most, harp at unity. However, the divine directive stands out for its moral tenor. Anyone else in this position may have preached tolerance and patience and insisted on displaying solidarity. However, Allah's directive is designed to transform man's morality. Accordingly, the believers are asked to become God-conscious. This is the feature of divine faith. In contrast, any man-made philosophy or "ism" is moulded by only ground realities and experiences. A leader succumbs to the aspirations of his people and presents a blueprint in line with their wishes. He does not leave any room for piety and moral values. Allah, nonetheless, exhorts Muslims to practise patience even in the face of the worst provocation, whether it be invasion, excess, or aggression. Even in such a situation Muslims are obliged to act with perseverance. They may be victims of an oppressor, indulging in aggression, rape, and ill-treatment of the old and scholars. Such reports of injustice are fairly common. Yet believers should fear Allah and display patience. Generally speaking, in such a situation one thinks only of retaliation and of teaching the enemy a lesson. In taking revenge one hardly observes any limit. However, the

Shari'ah keep the believers in check in such a situation, asking them to fear Allah, They are told not to behave like their oppressors in exceeding the limits, in gratifying their animal instincts and in turning a blind eye to moral values and norms. Rather, they are bound by the limits set by Allah. Thus the above passage represents a detailed guidance for Muslims.

All Muslims believe in the Qur'an, taking it as a miracle granted by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). We regard it as the Word of Allah. Let it also be realised that the Qur'an is a miracle both in its whole and in its various parts. In other words, each and every Qur'anic verse is a miracle in itself. Few recognise this truth, though it is generally believed that the Qur'an is a miracle. Its miraculous features appear in different ages in a variety of ways. The Qur'anic passage under study is a miracle in itself for its abiding message for us all.

It is hard to enumerate on how many occasions the Qur'an has guided mankind, especially in a crisis. It has given Muslims a new impetus — spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally and collectively. If we imbibe the message of this verse, and if Allah blesses us with strength and inspiration, we may derive all the benefits from such Qur'anic guidance. Rather, it would appear that the Qur'an has been sent down in our times, specifically addressed to us. ■

Love for the Prophet's Companions and His Family

Muslims consider it necessary to respect and hold in high esteem the Companions of the Prophet called Sahabah—those who lived in the days of the Prophet and benefitted from his company. Muslims consider them as their ideal and feel grateful to them for their selfless sacrifices and great contributions. Whenever they mention any of them, they say, “May Allah be pleased with them” after his name. Out of them four illustrious Companions—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali—may Allah be pleased with all of them—who became the caliphs of the Muslims successively after the demise of the Prophet are considered the most respectable among the Prophet's Companions and their names are mentioned after the Prophet's in the sermons of the Friday and Eid Prayers. Muslims also show special respect to six more Companions to whom the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him, conveyed glad tidings of the grant of paradise by Allah in their very lifetime. These ten Companions are called “the Ten Recipients of the Glad Tiding” (‘Ashra Mubashshara).

Muslims also hold dear the family members of the Prophet (called Ahle Bait) which include his wives, daughters, and grandsons (Imam Hasan and Imam Husain). Muslims always remember them with love and respect. They consider their love for the Prophet's family members as a natural outcome of their love for the Prophet. ■

Movement of Nadwatul Ulama- Importance And Necessity

- S. Bilal Abdul Hai Hasani Nadwi*

The main difference between modern and religious universities:

I want to tell you clearly that the purpose of modern universities is totally different, usually their purpose is to earn livelihood and there people study for achieving livelihood.

Needless to add that knowledge is not actually for livelihood, knowledge is for making a person a person, it is for a person to be useful, even if be it medical knowledge, or engineering knowledge or other sciences. In fact, all sciences were meant for man to master them and benefit mankind, but the current state of the world is that knowledge has become a business. There are those enormous schools and colleges, their fees and pocket moneys are just like that of business. So, a graduate of these institutions first thinks about how to recover what he has spent? Therefore, the result is in front of us that after studying these sciences, someone is becoming only a job oriented one.

And if we say in a polite way, we can say that he is worried about how he can earn money. In contrast, our religious institutions are actually meant to create human beings, to create a thought, and

all these Islamic Madrasas, which have the same foundation, which are related to the Suffa - e - Nabawi and about which Hazrat Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi has said with great force that any Madrasah which is not related to Suffa - e - Nabawi and Dar Arqam does not really deserve to be called a Madrasah. So, having come to these Madrasas to think that of our livelihood will be arranged and met, this is a gross omission.

Once a student asked that what has our institution arranged for us? We replied that these institutions are not for the management of livelihood, here the concern of Hereafter is taught, the way of success of Hereafter is taught and there is hard work for it. In reality, access and influence in knowledge is only possible when a person must try to reach the depth of the Quran and Sunnah and try to bring about a change in his life, during his stay there, that thing should be felt and seen.

What is intellectual breadth?

The main distinction of Nadwatul Ulama is breadth and dimension in thought. What is this breadth of thought? This also needs to be understood. This means that on the one hand there should be firmness in religion, firmness in al-Aqaeed(beliefs), firmness in al-Asul

* Rector Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow.

(principles), but with this, Nadwa has called for expansion in branches and resources, because resources keep changing and it is absolutely not necessary and appropriate for us to insist on one thing, we should also take advantage of new resources and technologies. This is the reason why Nadwa has always called for a change in the curriculum and not only called for it, but made major changes in it. If you study the eras of Nadwa and especially the era of Hazrat Maulana Ali Mian Nadwi, you will know that especially Hazrat Maulana got a whole new curriculum prepared and included its books in the curriculum of Nadwa. Apart from this, accident and syntax and other useful books on other subjects published by Arabic world were also incorporated in the curriculum.

We need to understand the purpose of Nadwa, we have to create influence in knowledge on the one hand and on the other hand we have to create the ability to convey the message with breadth of thought, but with full hardness in religion, full strength in beliefs. Continuity and breadth of thought does not at all mean that you will go astray or fall into intellectual deviation.

The need to recognize temptations and tribulations and avoid them: Today, in this age, there are similar temptations, as an example is given in the hadith that "Tribulations will be cast on hearts like the straws of a mat".

Similarly, today is the time of temptations, at this time, there are people born who have no deep connection with religious knowledge, but they have the ability to write and speak, and as a result, our young generation often follow them, they have no idea in which direction he is leading them. The truth is that they do not have that deep knowledge of the Shari'ah, nor are they aware of the foundations on which this edifice of Islam rests, but sometimes the road looks so good that one forgets it while driving where they have to turn and what is their destination, that is why they go far away from the destination. Similarly, those who read the books of such authors then do not remember what is right and what is wrong and they also accept many of the wrong things which are out of the spirit of Islam. We have a role model of Prophet's life in front of us, whether it is the Meccan period or the Madani period of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), both periods are ideal for us.

The fact is that this is also a mistake. Many people think that only the period of Madinah Tayyaba is ideal and the Meccan period before it is as if canceled. The truth is that the entire life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is an example for us and in this regard, no distinction has been made within the verse of the Holy Qur'an, which says:

(Cont. to page 24)

The Love of God

- John Ederer

The more you know someone and the more you like about what you know about them are the 2 factors which decide how much love you will have for him or her. When talking about God we have previously discussed all of the compassion. He shows us without us having done one thing for Him. God refers to Himself by the word Al-Wadood which we can try to translate as the deeply loving and affectionate.

“And He is the Forgiving and the Loving (Al-Wadood).” (Qur’an 85:14)

Secondly, He has sent Prophets with revelation that we may properly know Him and how to earn His love. For example God says-

“Say, If you really love God then follow me (Muhammad) and God will love you and forgive you your sins and God is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful.” (3: 31)

We can get an idea of how to earn the love of God in many other verses. Here are some of them-

“...And (sincerely) do good deeds. Indeed God loves those who do good deeds.” (Qur’an 2: 195)

“...Surely God loves those who repent as well as those who purify themselves.” (Qur’an 2:222)

“And of course, whoever fulfills his commitment and is conscious of God (and his responsibility to Him) then indeed, God loves the God-Conscious.”(Qur’an 3:76)

“...And God loves the patient and steadfast.”(3:146)

“And consult with your companions (in decision making). Then when you have made a decision rely upon God, Certainly, who rely upon Him.”(Qur’an 3:159)

“And if you judge, judge between them with justice. Indeed, God loves the just.” (Qur’an 5:42)

God Almighty also teaches us who He doesn't love so that we will know how to avoid His anger and punishment in this life and the hereafter-

“Fight for for the sake of God those who fight you. And do not transgress.

Indeed God does not like the transgressors.” (Qur’an 2:190)

“...God does not like corruption.” (Qur’an 2:205)

“God calls for the abolishment of usury and interest and gives increase (in reward) to charities. Indeed, God doesn’t like all sinful disbelievers.”(Qur’an 2:276)

“Say, obey God and His Messenger and if they turn away then (know that) God doesn’t like the ungrateful.”(Qur’an 3:32)

God Almighty makes it the key aspect of His relationship between Him and Us and He warns that those who would not follow His guidance are those who obviously don’t love Him. Their leaving His message will not affect Him at all it is just them failing the test of life by giving into their ignorance and desires. Indeed God will bring another group whom He love and who love Him.

“O you who believe, whoever among you turns away from Islam, then know that God will bring forth

in place of them a people He will love and they will love Him.” (Qur’an 5:54)

The Purpose of Life

God told us in the Qur’an that our relationship with Him and our purpose/test in life is based upon knowing Him and living a life of dedicated service to Him-

“And I did not create the Jinn and Mankind except that they would worship/serve Me.”(Qur’an 51:56)

The whole universe is in submission to the will of the Almighty. The trait that raises Mankind’s status above the rest is in the gift of intelligence. Mankind will have to use that intelligence to submit to God by his own choice and reject his own personal (animalistic desires). If he does submit, then he has truly put God before himself and realized the ultimate reality and purpose in life. That is to come to know God and serve Him. Then we will begin to shine the light of God upon the earth so that the rest of mankind may realize it. In glorifying His remembrance and living a life of constant worship, we fulfill the purpose of life which will lead to a state of peace and tranquility.” ■

India Must Protect And Preserve its Hard-Won Freedom

- Manmohan Singh*

The world's largest democracy is soon to become the most populous country on earth. Therefore, the celebration of 75 years of Independence brings a special responsibility to set global standards in the protection and the promotion of individual and collective freedoms. While every Indian will proudly salute the flag as it flies high, the Tricolour must also remind us of the composite culture which makes us a uniquely great democracy in the world. On this historic occasion, we must resolve to never let our freedoms be robbed by authoritarian arrogance or allow fomented hatred to undermine the unity of the Indian people. That is the best tribute we can pay to our flag.

A unity that is precious

India emerged from the chokehold of colonial rule to build a nation from a wide scatter of British-ruled territories and princely States. This unity did not magically materialise overnight. It was the freedom struggle, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and led by the Indian National Congress, which united Indians across the land to seek an end to foreign rule. This

* *Dr. Manmohan Singh was Prime Minister of India from 2004 to 2014*

movement united Indians across multiple identities of language, religion, caste, gender and social status. That unity is precious to India and should not be frittered away through communally divisive, linguistically chauvinist, callously casteist and gender insensitive campaigns that will fragment the Indian identity. Such ploys may pay temporary political dividends, by setting Indians against Indians, but they will create craters on India's path to progress as a great nation.

We were robbed of our riches by colonial rule and began our life after Independence as a poor developing country. We rose from that level to become one of the world's leading economies, whose growth is essential to the stability of the global economy. The policy of economic liberalisation, initiated in 1991, had a galvanising effect on our economic growth. At the same time, poverty reduction and the bridging of economic inequalities became a cardinal principle of public policy. As we pursue the path of inclusive economic growth, we should not permit only a select few among India's business leaders to reap the benefits of prosperity while income

gaps keep widening.

Flag divisive politics

Jobless growth is not a safe bet for any economy. Unemployment not only does not permit the optimal use of our human resources but also creates the breeding ground for social discord and divisive politics. As we move ahead towards the next 25 years of independent India, we must aim to optimally utilise the demographic dividend of a young population through education, skilling, suitable employment and support to young entrepreneurs and innovators. This requires easy mobility across the country for education and employment. Communal and linguistic barriers will hinder such mobility and adversely impact growth. Captains of Indian industry must recognise this danger and raise their voice for national unity, not remain mute spectators when divisive politics are posing a threat to the economy.

Uphold scientific tradition

India adopted excellence in science as a path to progress since the early years of Independence. The national science policy was forward looking. Great institutions of scientific learning and research were established. India's various institutes of technology have won world renown,

with many of their graduates leading global enterprises of repute. Our space, oceanography and nuclear programmes have placed us in a select group of nations whose scientific prowess and technological excellence are respectfully acknowledged by the whole world. It would be unfortunate if our scientific institutions, universities and research bodies are undermined through the induction of sub-optimal leadership, whose given mandate is to pursue cultural revivalism at the cost of academic integrity. India has had a proud scientific tradition since ancient times, but that should not become the camouflage for pseudo-science that brings discredit to our scientific community.

In the comity of nations, India won respect for adopting principled positions, opposing colonial rule, leading the Non-Aligned Movement when two power blocs were seeking global domination, espousing human rights and promoting the cause of peace. Our relations with most of our neighbours were cordial. Even when we had conflicts with some, we tried to build bridges of understanding to enable peaceful co-existence. We need to maintain these positions, even as the world witnesses new conflicts and alliances. It is essential for us to be regarded as a reliable and

respected friend in most countries of the world, but especially in South Asia. We should not let our foreign policy wobble through dependence on personalised gestures for the camera but follow clear-headed initiatives through wise leadership supported by able diplomats.

Well-being of the young

India must focus on enhancing the health, education and skilling of young persons. The recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reminds us that stunting, under-nourishment and anaemia continue to afflict a large percentage of our children and women in the reproductive age group. We need to ensure that the nutrition-specific programmes deliver, even as we advance nutrition-sensitive policies in other sectors, especially water and sanitation.

COVID-19 revealed several weaknesses in our health system. From disease surveillance to provision of health care, we need to strengthen the capacity of health services. There are marked differences in the capacity and performance of health systems across different States. It is essential that States invest more in health and also that centrally sponsored programmes aim to provide greater support to States

whose health indicators are lagging. Providing needed health services to all persons, with adequate financial protection, must be the goal of universal health coverage. We must achieve this uniformly across the whole country.

For the citizen to ponder over

As a young boy of 14, I experienced both the exhilaration of newly gained independence as well as the painful tragedies that marred the country's partition. I hoped that India would grow strong as a nation without ever again having to experience such discord. Today, I am proud of what India has achieved and am optimistic about the future of this great nation. However, I am also worried about the sectarian slogans and communal slurs that are vitiating social harmony and dividing the people. Alongside, there is also a weakening of institutions which must safeguard democratic freedoms, uphold norms of good governance and shield electoral politics from the onslaught of money power and co-opted state agencies. It is for the citizens of India to protect and preserve the hard won gains of our freedom. Let each one of us reflect on that duty as we raise and salute our flag. ■

(The Hindu 01-01-2025)

Despondency-A Very Dangerous Disease

- Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

Allah is our creator, cherisher and the Lord of the worlds. He created everything for mankind. The very first thing for us is to believe in Allah and His last messenger Muhammad (PBUH). As we know " Kalimah Tayyibah" or "Kalima Shahadah" i.e. La laha Illallahu Muhammadur Rasulullah (There is none worthy of worship besides Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah). This is the very first Kalimah by uttering it one enters into the fold of Islam. Besides Kalima Shahadah, there are seven essentials for every Muslim to believe in. "I believe in Allah, in His Angels, His Scriptures, His Messengers, the Day of Judgment and that every thing good and bad(in the world) is pre - destined by Allah the Exalted, and I believe in resurrection after death." This is called Iman Mufassal.

It should be noted that only after believing in Allah and His last prophet Muhammad (PBUH), every Muslim can lead a pious and tension free life in this world. Islam always encourages us to achieve progress and prosperity and get success in every walk of life. It abhors despondency and despair. The Holy Qur'an says, "So, verily, with every

difficulty, there is relief. Verily, with every difficulty, there is a relief". (S.94. Verse 5-6)

The above mentioned two verses of the Holy Qur'an vividly tell us that we encounter many failures, setbacks and difficulties in this world. But we should not lose heart and also should not become despondent. For Allah always provides a solution, a way out and a relief after every problem and difficulty.

The Holy Qur'an further says, "And never give up hope of Allah's soothing Mercy- truly no one despairs of Allah's soothing Mercy except those who have no faith." (S. 12. Verse.87) "Despair not of the Mercy of Allah". (S.39. Verse.53)

It is unfortunate that " The Muslim Umma is passing through a very crucial time in its history. Muslims are subjugated, humiliated and overawed by the forces of their adversaries. They are divided, disintegrated, feeling low, weak and uncertain. Muslim governments are under the domination of an elite group of Western educated oligarchs or hereditary rulers who are manipulated by different world powers. They in turn undermine the revival of Islamic teachings and culture, and in this

way the Muslim Ummah is torn apart from within as well. Infighting on issues of nationality, language, schools of fiqh, race, etc., is rampant in the Muslim societies of many countries. Seeing this situation people become very despondent. In their despair they adopt strategies to reverse the situation which are futile and may violate Islamic teachings. To start with, to be despondent is a very dangerous disease. It is like a cancer that destroys the body's cells. Yet how can we Muslims be desperate when we believe in Allah and His Mercy?

To come out of this spiral of despondency and despair we require knowledge and insight as well as courage and determination. It is agreed the situation of Muslim Ummah is very serious and painful to talk about. Yet we have to hope. It is only unbelievers who have lost hope in Allah's Mercy.

The word Iblis, the other name for Satan, comes from the root that means one who has lost hope. Whereas Adam after making his mistake repented and sought forgiveness, Iblis was arrogant and rebelled, thus losing hope in Allah's Mercy. Although the situation of our Ummah at present is precarious we should be hopeful that it will change for the better. By being hopeful it is not

meant that we close our eyes to the facts and live in a fool's paradise. Or behave like an ostrich and bury our heads in the sand. We have to work hard and hope that with our very humble efforts we can bring about change in our society; just like a very dim light in a very dark room can illuminate the way to salvation. If we work sincerely and wholeheartedly with hope we will in sha Allah see the results. We have the example of our Prophet (PBUH) when he left Taif bruised and injured. Yet he said I am not despondent. A new generation will come and they will worship Allah. If our Prophet can hope and pray that Abu Jahl or Umar who were enemies of Islam can become Muslims, why can't we hope that Iman will grace our enemies? If the descendants of Halaku Khan can become Muslims why should we be despondent when it is possible that those who are persecuting us will eventually become people of faith?" (Lift Up Your Hearts, P 78-79) In short, Satan always tries to create despondency and despair in us to turn us away from the right path. Hence, the need of the hour is that we must become aware of trickery and deception of Satan and follow the teachings of Islam in letter and spirit by reposing full trust in Allah's Mercy. Undoubtedly, in doing so we can get success in this world and the Hereafter. ■

Dhikr Of Allah

- S. Sulaiman Nadwi

The Holy Qur'an has explained the special quality of the believers: So when thou art relieved, still toil. And strive to please thy Lord.

(Solace)

Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and reclining.

(The Family of 'Imran)

And the preacher of the Qur'an was himself the true embodiment of this virtue. Hadrat 'A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) remained always busy in remembrance of Allah. Rabi'a (may Allah be pleased with her) who performed the duty of a guard in the night said that hearing the voice of Tasbih and Tahlil of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) I felt tired and went to sleep. He was always absorbed in the dhikr of Allah with deep devotion and fervour while he was sitting, standing, walking, eating and drinking, waking or sleeping, at the time of ablution, wearing new clothes, riding, proceeding on a journey, on return, while entering the house, mosque, in short, on every occasion. Due to this reason many prayers have been mentioned in

Ahadith to be recited at different times and occasions. During the last days of his life when the Surah Idha Ja'a was revealed in which it was commanded to pronounce Tahmid and Tasbih, the wives of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) always recited in the morning and in the evening these words of Tasbih and Tahlil.

Hadrat Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) often recited this prayer after short intervals. My Lord! Forgive me, and relent towards me. Thou art the relenting the forgiving. We counted and found that he recited these words a hundred times at one sitting. He never forgot to remember Allah in all sorts of situations; at the time of hurry of proceeding on a journey and during the journey. He observed nawafil riding a beast without caring whether the direction was towards the Qibla or not and he observed prayer turning his face towards the direction of his beast keeping in view: And withers ever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance.

Zeal and Fervour

When the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was busy in conversation in the company of his companions or his wives in the apartments and heard the voice of Adhan, he stood up at once. Although he spent the major part of the night waking (for prayer and supplications) yet hearing the call of Mu'adhhdhin for the morning prayer, he got up from his bed. The spiritual zeal, fervour and devotion with which he prayed in the night are explained below in the words of Hadrat 'A'isha (may Allah be pleased with her): Sometimes he spent the whole night standing up for prayer. He recited the Surahs, Baqarah, Al-i-'Imran, Nisa', the most lengthy Surahs of the Holy Qur'an. When he recited an Ayah (verse) of fear and warning, he sought forgiveness and refuge from Allah and when any Ayah (verse) containing glad tidings of Allah's favour and rewards was recited, he prayed for their attainment. He recited the Holy Qur'an so loudly that the people listened to it in their houses. Sometimes he was entirely absorbed in the beauty and excellence of the verse. One day he recited the verse: If you punish them, they are your servants and if you forgive them, verily you are the Mighty, the Wise.

He was so much influenced by the above verse that he recited this verse till it was morning.

Zaid b. Khalid al-Juhani said: I would definitely watch at night the prayer observed by the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), He prayed two short Rak'ahs, then two long, long Rak'ahs, then he prayed eight Rak'ahs by observing two Rak'ahs separately which were each time shorter than the two preceding, then he observed witr. Khabbab has reported: One night Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stood up for prayer and he remained busy in prayer and supplications till morning.

Hudhaifa reported: 'I prayed with Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) one night and he started reciting al-Baqarah. I thought that he would bow at the end of one hundred verses, but he proceeded on; I then thought that he would perhaps bow on completing (this Surah). He then started Al-i-'Imran and recited it, then started an-Nisa' and recited leisurely. And when he recited the verses, he also recited Tasbih, and supplications according to the subject dealt with in these verses. Then he bowed; his bowing lasted about the same length as his standing. He then stood up about the same length as he had spent in bowing. He then prostrated himself, and his prostration lasted nearly the same length as his standing. ■

The Deeper Meaning of Declining School Enrolment

- Furqan Qamar & Sameer Ahmad

As the world's most populous country, India hopes to reap its demographic dividend due to its burgeoning youth population. Demographers and policy planners always knew that this window of opportunity would remain open, but only for a limited time. Declining school enrolment over the past decade marks the beginning of the end of this period. This means that India may become older even before becoming rich.

It is no wonder that the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (U-DISE+) data for 2022-23 and 2023-24, which was released by the Ministry of Education on December 30, 2024, caused much consternation as it showed a 15.5 million drop (6%) in school enrolment since 2018-19.

The official line versus the reality

Official sources have attributed the decline in enrolment to improvements in data collection. They explain that seeding Aadhaar numbers with enrolment eliminates multiple enrolments. This may sound plausible because it has long been suspected that some children are enrolled in multiple schools.

However, an analysis of decade-long data (2014-15 to 2023-24) on

enrolment and its correlation with different independent variables, including the changes in the population in the age groups relevant to schooling, tells a different story. In fact, it shows a rather grim picture. The needle points toward the beginning of the end of the era of reaping the demographic dividend.

It is a matter of concern that school enrolment has plummeted 24.51 million, or 9.45%, over the past decade, with elementary-level enrolment registering a rather pronounced fall of 18.7 million (13.45%). Up to this level, education has been free and compulsory under the Right to Education (RTE) Act since 2009.

In comparison, secondary-level enrolment declined by 1.43 million (3.75%), whereas senior secondary-level enrolments have increased by 3.63 million (15.46%) over the decade. This means that the decline began only recently.

Government and private schools

The data further show that enrolment in government and government-aided schools, which account for more than 65% of the total school enrolment (and the mainstay of the poor and marginalised sections of society), recorded a significantly higher

decline: by 19.89 million (13.8%) and 4.95 million (16.41%), respectively.

In these schools, too, the decline in enrolment at the elementary level has been rather pronounced: 21.78 million (18.31%) in government schools and 3.85 million (24.34%) in government-aided schools. They have also experienced lower enrolment at the secondary level, albeit at a lower rate.

Private unaided schools have been an exception, as their total enrolment increased by 1.61 million, or 2.03%. Notably, however, they registered only a marginal increase in elementary and secondary level enrolment, though their senior secondary-level enrolment surged by 1.41 million (15.55%). These schools seemingly bucked the trend but did not remain entirely unaffected.

Enrolment has declined across the board and persisted since 2014-15, particularly at the elementary levels. They can neither be ascribed to methodological changes nor dismissed as a one-off temporary event. They reflect a systematic transition. The nation is at the cusp of a paradigm shift, and one does not have to go too far to prove this point.

It may not be a coincidence that the country's school-going population in the age -group of 6-17 years has also declined by 17.30 million (5.78%) over the past decade. The decline in the

population in the age groups of 6-13 and 14-15 years, relevant to enrolment at the elementary and secondary levels, has dropped by 18.7 million (9.12%) and 2.17 million (4.35%), respectively.

Delving deeper, the data discern a statistically significant strong positive correlation between school enrolment and the estimated population in the relevant age group, so much so that the decline in the population of the relevant age group explains the 60.36% decline in enrolment.

The finding is further corroborated by the fact that the number of schools in the country has also declined by 79,109, from 1.55 million in 2017-18 to 1.47 million in 2023-14, a decline of 5.1%. These are in sync with the fact that India's fertility rate declined to 2.01 in 2022, which is far below the replacement level of 2.10. The persistent plummeting of school enrolment is mainly due to demographic changes, which do not augur well for the country.

The social impact

A burgeoning youth population is necessary for enrolment growth, which India has been experiencing until recently. It has now entered the phase when the population bulge is shifting to the right. Since the process began only recently, it is reflected rather sharply in elementary-level enrolment. The effect will gradually but firmly be felt in

secondary and senior secondary-level enrolment, and will finally impinge on higher education.

As is already the case in most developed countries, we will soon face the transition to a shrinking working-age population. This is disconcerting because it is happening sooner than expected.

Ideally, a country must reap as demographic dividend as possible to generate much-needed income and

wealth to support and 91 sustain the burden of an ageing population, will likely see its population becoming rich.

Declining school enrolment has less to do with the change in data collection method than a shift in the demographic bulge to the right. Unless the 2021 Census, which is yet begin presents a different demographic trend, it could mark the beginning of the end of the demographic dividend for India.■

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(Cont. from page 12)

Verily, Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the best model for you. (Al-Ahzab:21) It is clear from the generality of this verse that the Meccan period of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is also good and the Madani period of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is also good. Therefore, we need to learn from the environment we are in, the country we are in and the conditions we are facing. For all these occasions we have the ideal of the Holy Prophet before us.

In the present era, most of the people who do not have deep study of Hadith and Seerat are prone to deviance, and they consider a few external impressions of the Qur'an and Hadith to be enough for them and think that they are too received by it. There is no doubt that the Holy Qur'an is the first original Divine book, but the original interpretation of the Holy Qur'an is the one that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained.

Hence, we must study the Holy Qur'an deeply to find things that are different from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The Holy Prophet says, "Whoever interprets the Qur'an with his own opinion, even though he is right, he makes a mistake". (Al Tirmidhi:3206)

That is why we should see what education we get from the Sunnah and what lesson we get from the biography of the Prophet (PBUH) and what interpretation of the Holy Qur'an has been given by the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). (English rendering Obaidur Rahman Nadwi)■

(To be continued)

The Fasting (Sawm)

- Hammudah Abdalati

Another unique moral and spiritual characteristic of Islam is the prescribed institution of Fasting. Literally defined, fasting means to abstain “completely” from foods, drinks, intimate intercourses and smoking, before the break of the dawn till sunset, during the entire month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year. But if we restrict the meaning of the Islamic Fasting to this literal sense, we would be sadly mistaken.

When Islam introduced this matchless institution, it planted an ever-growing tree of infinite virtue and invaluable products. Here is an explanation of the spiritual meaning of the Islamic Fasting.

1. It teaches man the principle of sincere Love; because when he observes the Fasting he does it out of deep love for God. And the man who loves God truly is a man who really knows what love is.
2. It equips man with a creative, sense of Hope and an optimistic outlook on life; because when he fasts he is hoping to please God and is seeking His Grace.
3. It imbues man with a genuine virtue of effective Devotion, honest Dedication and closeness to God; because when he fasts he does so for God and for His sake alone.
4. It cultivates in man a vigilant and sound Conscience; because the fasting

person keeps his Fast in secret as well as in public. In Fasting, especially, there is no mundane authority to check man's behavior or compel him to observe the Fasting. He keeps it to please God and satisfy his own conscience by being faithful in secret and in public. There is no better way to cultivate a sound conscience in man.

5. It indoctrinates man in Patience and Unselfishness; because when he fasts he feels the pains of deprivation but endures patiently. Truly this deprivation may be only temporary, yet there is no doubt that the experience makes him realize the severe effects of such pains on others, who might be deprived of essential commodities for days or weeks or probably months together. The meaning of this experience in a social and humanitarian sense is that such a person is much quicker than anybody else in sympathizing with his fellow men and responding to their needs. And that is an eloquent expression of unselfishness and genuine sympathy.

6. It is an effective lesson in applied Moderation and Willpower. The person who observes his Fasting properly is certainly a man who can discipline his passionate desires and place his self above physical temptations. Such is the man of personality and character, the man

of willpower and determination.

7. It provides man with a Transparent soul to transcend, a Clear Mind to think and a Light Body to move and act. All this is the never-failing result of carrying a light stomach. Medical instructions, biological rules and intellectual experience attest to this fact.

8. It shows man a new way of Wise Savings and Sound Budgeting; because normally when he eats less quantities or less meals he spends less money and effort. And this is a spiritual semester of home economics and budgeting.

9. It enables man to master the art of Mature Adaptability. We can easily understand the point once we realize that Fasting makes man change the entire course of his daily life. When he makes the change, he naturally adapts himself to a new system and moves along to satisfy the new rules. This, in the long run, develops in him a wise sense of adaptability and a self-created power to overcome the unpredictable hardships of life. A man who values constructive adaptability and courage will readily appreciate the effects of Fasting in this respect.

10. It grounds man in Discipline and Healthy Survival. When a person observes the regular course of Fasting in consecutive days of the Holy Month and in the Holy Months of the consecutive years, he is certainly applying himself to a high form of discipline and a superb sense

of order. Similarly, when he relieves his stomach and relaxes his digestive system, he is indeed insuring his body, not to mention the soul, against all harm that results from stomach overcharge. In this manner of relaxation he may be sure that his body will survive free from the usual disorder and break. and that his soul will continue to shine purely and peacefully.

11. It originates in man the real Spirit of Social Belonging, of Unity and Brotherhood, of Equality before God as well as before the Law. This spirit is the natural product of the fact that when man fasts, he feels that he is joining the whole Muslim society in observing the same duty in the same manner at the same time for the same motives to the same end. No sociologist can say that there has been at any period of history anything comparable to this fine institution of Islam. People have been crying throughout the ages for acceptable belonging, for unity, for brotherhood, for equality, but how echoless their voice has been, and how very little success they have met! Where can they find their goals without the guiding light of Islam?

12. It is a Godly prescription for self-reassurance and self-control, for maintenance of human dignity and freedom, for victory and peace. These results never fail to manifest themselves as a lively reality in the heart of the person who known how to keep the Fasting. When he fasts in the proper manner, he is in

control of himself, exercises full command over his passions, disciplines his desires and resists all evil temptations. By this course, he is in a position to reassure himself, to restore his dignity and integrity to attain freedom from the captivity of evil. Once he obtains all thing, he has established inner pence, which is the source of permanent peace with God and, consequently, with the entire universe.

Now, someone may be tempted to raise the objection: If this is the case with the Islamic institution of Fasting, and if this is the picture of Islam in this aspect, why are the Muslims not living in a utopia? To such an objection we can only say that the Muslims have lived in and enjoyed a utopia in a certain epoch of their history. The realization of that utopia was a phenomenon of a unique achievement in the history of man. We say unique, because no religion or social system other than Islam has ever been able to realize its ideals in reality. The utopia of other religions and social systems has always remained in the category of theories or wishful thinking and dreams—sometimes clear, sometimes vague, sometimes near, most of the time far. But the utopia of Islam was realized and put into practice and production at full capacity. In a human and practical sense this means that the utopia of Islam can be reestablished once again right here on this earth, and that it is raised on solid foundations and practicable principles.

The reason why the Islamic utopia

is not being established nowadays is manifold and easily explicable. But to restrict our discussion to the institution of Fasting we may say that many Muslims, unfortunately for them, do not observe the fast or, at best, adopt the attitude of indifference. On the other hand, most of those who observe it do not realize its true meaning and, as a result, derive very little benefit out of it or, in fact, no benefit at all. That is why the Muslims of today, on the whole, do not enjoy the real privileges of Fasting.

Again, someone else may say that what is claimed about the Islamic Fasting is also true of other types of fasting like the Jewish Passover, the Christian Lent, the Ghandian Type, etc. Why, then, do the Muslims make these arbitrary claims about their type of Fasting?

To such a person and to all others like him we direct our appeal. It is against our religious principles and our morals as Muslims to defame any prophet of God. or reject any truth, or falsify any Divine religion. Other people do feel free to commit these irresponsible offenses, but we Muslims do not; because we know that once we plunge into this low level of morality or rather immorality, we are virtually out of the ranks of Islam. We do also know that the institution of Fasting is as old as history itself, and that it was prescribed by God for the people before Islam as it has been prescribed by Hint for the Muslims. But we do not know and we do not believe that many people know

the exact form or the proper manners in which God prescribed those other types of Fasting. However, we may, for the sake of the truth and enlightened curiosity, substantiate our contentions by comparing this institution of Islam with the other types of fasting:

Fasting in Comparative Perspective

1. In other religions and dogmas, in other philosophies and doctrines, the observer of fast abstains from certain kinds of food or drinks or material substances, but he is free to substitute for that and fill his stomach to the top with the substituting stuff, which is also of material nature. In Islam one abstains from the things of material nature—food, drink, smoking, etcetera, in order to have spiritual joys and moral nourishment. The Muslim empties his stomach of all the material things: to fill his soul with peace and blessings, to fill his heart with love and sympathy, to fill his spirit with piety and Faith, to fill his mind with wisdom and resolution.

2. The purpose of Fasting in other religions and philosophies is invariably partial. It is either for spiritual aims, OR for physical needs, OR for intellectual cultivations; never for all combined. But in Islam it is for all these gains and many other purposes, social and economic, moral and humanitarian, private and public, personal and common, inner and outer, local and national—all combined together as mentioned above.

3. The non-Islamic Fasting does not demand more than partial abstinence from certain material things. But the Islamic type is accompanied by extra devotion and worship, extra charity and study of the Qur'an, extra sociability and liveliness, extra self-discipline and conscience-awakening. Thus the fasting Muslim feels a different person altogether. He is so pure and clean inside as well as outside, and his soul is so transparent that he feels close to perfection because he is so near to God.

4. To the best of our knowledge and on the authority of daily experience, other moral philosophies and religions teach man that he cannot attain his moral aims or enter the Kingdom of God unless and until he uproots himself from the stem of worldly affairs. Accordingly, it becomes necessary for such a man to divorce his mundane interests, neglect his human responsibilities and resort to some kind of self-torture or severe asceticism of which fasting is an essential element. Fasting of this kind with people of this type may be used - and it has been used as a pretext to cover the humiliating retreat from the normal course of life. But Fasting in Islam is not a divorce from life but a happy marriage with it, not a retreat but a penetration with spiritual armaments, not a negligence but a moral enrichment. The Islamic Fasting does not divorce religion from daily life or separate the soul from the body. It does not break but harmonizes. It does not dissolve but

transfuses. It does not disintegrate but bridges and redeems.

5. Even the timetable of the Islamic Fasting is a striking phenomenon. In other cases the time of Fasting is fixed at a certain time of the year in a most inflexible way. But in Islam the time comes with the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the year. The Islamic Calendar is a lunar one, and months go according to the various positions of the moon. This means that over a period of a limited number of years the Islamic Fasting covers the four major seasons of the year and circulates back and forth between the summer and the winter through the fall and the spring in a rotating manner. The nature of the lunar calendar is such that the month of Ramadan falls in January, for example, in one year and in December in another year, and at any time in between during the succeeding years. In a spiritual sense this means that the Muslim enjoys the moral experience of Fasting on various levels, and tastes its spiritual flavors at variant seasons of variant climates, sometimes in the winter of short and cold days, sometimes in the summer of long and hot days, sometimes in between. But this variety of experience remains at all times an impressive feature of the liveliness of the Islamic institution. It also stands as an unflinching expression of readiness, dynamism and adaptability on the part of the Muslim believer. This is certainly a healthy, remarkable component of the teachings of Islam.

The Period of Fasting

It has already been indicated that the period of obligatory Fasting is the month of Ramadan. The daily period of observance starts before the break of the dawn and ends immediately after sunset. Normally there are accurate calendars to tell the exact time, but in the absence of such facilities one should consult one's watch and the sun's positions together with the local newspapers, weather bureau etc.

The Fasting of Ramadan is obligatory on every responsible and fit Muslim (Mukallaf). But there are other times when it is strongly recommended, after the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad. Among these times are Mondays and Thursdays of every week, a few days of each month in the two months heralding the coming of Ramadan, i.e., Rajab and Sha'ban, six days after Ramadan following the 'Eed-ul-Fitr Day. Besides, it is always compensating to fast any day of any month of the year, except the 'Eed Days and Fridays when no Muslim should fast. However, we may repeat that the only obligatory Fasting is that of Ramadan—which may be 29 or 30 days, depending on the moon's positions. This is a pillar of Islam, and any failure to observe it without reasonable excuses is a severely punishable sin.

Knowing what Fasting can do for man, God has enjoined, as an alternative, the fast of three days on anyone who breaks an oath. Similarly, if someone

declares his wife as forbidden for him as his mother,—an old pre-Islamic custom, he must pay for his carelessness and irresponsibility. To expiate for this sin he has, as an alternative, to observe the fast of two consecutive months (Qur'an, 2:183-185; 5:92; 58:1-4)

Who Must Fast?

The Fasting of Ramadan is compulsory upon every Muslim, male or female, who has these qualifications:

1. To be mentally and physically fit, which means to be sane and able;
2. To be of full age, the age of puberty and discretion, which is normally about fourteen. Children under this age should be encouraged to start this good practice on easy levels, so when they reach the age of puberty they will be mentally and physically prepared to observe the Fasting;
3. To be present at your permanent settlement, your home town, your form, your business promises, etc. This means not to be travelling on a journey of about fifty miles or more;
4. To be fairly certain that the Fasting is unlikely to cause you any harm, physical or mental, other than the normal reactions to hunger, thirst, etc.

Exemption From Fasting

These said qualifications exclude the following categories:

1. Children under the age of puberty

and discretion;

2. The insane people who are unaccountable for their deeds. People of these two categories are exempted from the duty of fast, and no compensation or any other substitute is enjoined on them;

3. Men and women who are too old and feeble to undertake the obligation of fast and bear its hardships. Such people are exempted from this duty, but they must offer, at least, one needy poor Muslim an average full meal or its value per person per day. This compensation indicates that whenever they can fast even for one day of the month, they should do so, and compensate for the rest. Otherwise they are accountable for their negligence;

4. Sick people whose health is likely to be severely affected by the observance of fast. They may postpone the fast, as long as they are sick, to a later date and make up for it, a day for a day;

5. People in the course of travelling of distances about fifty miles or more. In this case such people may break the fast temporarily during their travel only and make up for it in later days, a day for a day. But it is better for them, the Qur'an tells, to keep the fast if they can without causing extraordinary hardships;

6. Expectant women and women nursing their children may also break the fast, if its observance is likely to endanger their own health or that of their infants. But they must make up for the fast at a delayed time, a day for a day;

7. Women in the period of menstruation (of a maximum of ten days) or of confinement (of a maximum of forty days). These are not allowed to fast even if they can and want to. They must postpone the fast till recovery and then make up for it, a day for a day.

It should be understood that here, like in all other Islamic undertakings, the intention must be made clear that this action is undertaken in obedience to God, in response to His command and out of love for Him.

The fast of any day of Ramadan becomes void by intentional eating or drinking or smoking or indulgence in any intimate inter. courses, and by allowing anything to enter through the mouth into the interior parts of the body. And if this is done deliberately without any lawful reason, the penalty is to observe the fast of sixty consecutive days or, as a second alternative, feed sixty poor persons sufficiently, besides observing the fast of one day against the day whose fast was made void.

When the fast of days other than those of Ramadan is broken for a lawful reason like those classified under the heading "Exemption" above, the person involved must make up for that fast later, a day for a day.

If anyone, by mistake, does something that would ordinarily break the fast, his observance is not nullified, and his fast stands valid, provided he stops

doing that thing the moment he realizes what he is doing.

On completion of the fast of Ramadan, the special charity known as Sadqatu-l-Fitr (Charity of Fast-breaking) must be distributed.

General Recommendations

It is strongly recommended by Prophet Muhammad to observe these practices especially during Ramadan:

1. To have a light meal before the break of the dawn, known as Suhoor;
2. To eat three dates and have a drink of water right after sunset, saying this prayer: Al-lahumma laka sumna, wa 'ala rizqika aftarna. (O God! for Your sake we have fasted and now we break the fast with the food You have given us);
3. To make your meals as light as possible because, as the prophet put it, the worst thing man can fill is his stomach;
4. To observe the supererogatory prayer known as Taraweeh;
5. To exchange social visits and intensify humanitarian services;
6. To increase study and recitation of the Qur'an;
7. To exert the utmost in patience and humbleness;
8. To be extraordinarily cautious in using the senses, the mind and, especially, the tongue; to abstain from careless and gossipy chats and avoid all suspicious motion. ■

Anas bin Malik (May Allah be pleased with him)

He was Anas bin Malik bin An-Nadr bin Damdam bin Zaid bin Haram bin Jundub Al-Ansari Al-Khazraji Al-Bukhari Al-Madani.

He was the servant of the Messenger of Allah, his close friend and Companion and the last of the Companions to die, may Allah be pleased with him and make him pleased.

His Mother

She was Al-Ghumaisa' Umm Sulaim bint Milhan bin Khalid Al-Ansariyah Al-Khazrajiyah from Al-Madinah. She was one of the Muslim women who pledged their allegiance to the Messenger of Allah during the pledge of the women; they pledged to him that they would not associate any partners with Allah, that they would not steal, that they would not commit illegal acts, that they would not kill their children, that they would not utter slander intentionally forging falsehood, and that they would not disobey any command given to them by the Messenger of Allah. Umm Sulaim fulfilled her promise and kept her covenant with the Messenger of Allah. She was a truthful believing woman, who devoted her life to Allah, who abided by the limits set by Allah, the Most High with regard to herself and her children, in addition to her great love

for the Messenger of Allah and is there anything that proves more conclusively a person's faith than love of the Messenger of Allah, when he said: "None of you has (complete) faith until I am more beloved to him than his father, his children and his own self."

When Umm Anas embraced Islam, her husband, Abu Anas bin Malik bin An-Nadr was still a disbeliever and he did not accept her conversion to Islam. She wished that he should be guided, after she had come to know the path of truth and the sweetness of faith. She would denigrate the gods of Quraish that he worshipped, saying: "How can you worship stones which can neither harm nor benefit you and reject the worship of Allah, Who created you and sustains you and He is the One Who can harm or benefit you, the Giver of life and the Bringer of death, Who levelled the earth and raised the heavens without supports. And here you see Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj have hastened to believe in Allah and His Messenger, so why do you not hasten and believe like them?"

But Malik clung fiercely to his misguidance, believing strongly in the gods which could neither harm nor benefit him. Satan had made him blind, so that he could not see the light and he had overwhelmed his heart, so that he did not follow the truth. The words of

Umm Sulaim fell upon him like whiplashes and he tried by every means to stop her, but when he saw her determination to hold fast to her religion, he left Al-Madinah angrily and set out on a journey to Ash-Sham and while he was on the road to Ash-Sham, he was set upon by some highwaymen and they killed him, so he died as a disbeliever.

Umm Anas was the best of believing mothers, who devoted all of her care and attention to her son, concerning herself with his mind and his religion, just as she concerned herself with his physical needs: She taught him reading and writing until he became proficient in them and she taught him the memorization of the Surahs and Verses from the Noble Qura'n that she knew and the Ahadith of the Messenger of Allah, until he was able to sit with the men in their study meetings, while he was still a young boy.

Abu Talhah had proposed marriage to her more than once, but she refused him every time and when he pressed her, she said: "There is no fault in you except that you are a polytheist and I have embraced Islam. I will not marry a disbeliever, who does not follow the religion of Muhammad."

Abu Talhah left her, but something took root in his heart and he made a decision to himself and he left that place to look for the Messenger of Allah and he declared his conversion to Islam and pronounced the Shahadatan, then he

returned to Umm Anas and informed her that he had embraced Islam and she married him. Her dowry was his entry into the fold of Islam.

Anas in the House of the Prophet

Umm Anas was a far-sighted woman, with a superior intellect and she knew that a person only attains his true worth by virtue of his religion and his character; and she also knew that the true religion and the highest character is not attained except by following a righteous example and by acquiring useful knowledge, which is why she placed his teaching in the hands of the best teacher and the most superior role model the Messenger of Allah.

Umm Anas took Anas by the hand and he was eight years of age and went with him to the Messenger of Allah and said to him: "Oh, Messenger of Allah! There is no man or woman among the Ansar who has not presented you with some gift, but I am unable to present you with anything except this son of mine, so take him and let him serve you in any way that you see fit."

So, Anas attended the Messenger of Allah and in his closeness to him there was a great blessing for his religion, for his character and for his knowledge, for he absorbed the best of morals from the best of people in morals and he acquired knowledge from the fountainhead of knowledge and he learned how to worship Allah from one

whose worship was a model of perfection for every worshipper.

The Messenger of Allah used to favor Anas with advice and guidance in all aspects of his life, in his prayer, in his speech, in eating and drinking, so that he grew up as an example to every person who seeks to worship Allah in the correct manner, and as an example of a Muslim of high Islamic moral character in his dealings with the people. The books of Ahadith are full of such advices which were narrated by Anas from the Prophet.

Anas said that the Prophet said to him:

“Oh, my boy! You must perform the ablution well and your two guardians (i.e., the angels on the right and left) will love you and your lifespan will be increased”

Oh, Anas! Exceed the minimum that is required when you perform complete ablution (Ghusl) for major ritual impurity (Janabah), for you will complete your ablution and there will be neither sin nor error upon you.” Anas said: “How should I exceed the minimum, oh, Messenger of Allah?” He said: “Make the water reach the roots of your hair and wet all of the skin.”

“Oh, my son! If you are able to continue always to perform ablution, then (know) that whoever died in a state of ritual purity, he will be granted martyrdom.”

“Oh, my son! If you are able to continue praying always, then (know) that the angels will pray over you so long as you are still praying.

He also said to him, advising him and ordering him:

“Oh, my son! If you enter your house, then greet yourself and your family with salutations of peace.”

“Oh, my son! If you are able to awake and say Bismillah, while there is nothing in your heart for anyone, it will make the Reckoning easier for you.

The Messenger of Allah used to treat Anas well, speak kindly to him and deal with him benevolently. He neither raised a whip over him nor did he raise his voice against him throughout the length of his service with him, which lasted for ten years or thereabouts. Anas said: “I served the Messenger of Allah for ten years and he never struck me a single blow, nor did he malign me, nor even frown at me.”

The Messenger of Allah used to play with him and joke with him, on one occasion he joked with him, saying: “Oh, you owner of two ears.”

Thus Anas found in the house of the Messenger of Allah a fine role model and useful knowledge, and he also found a kindhearted guardian and an affectionate father, who replaced the father he had lost and made him forget that he was an orphan.”

The Messenger of Allah supplicates on behalf of Anas

One of the signs of the love that the Messenger of Allah had for Anas was that he frequently supplicated Allah on his behalf in all matters relating to his religion and his worldly affairs.

Anas said: "Umm Sulaim brought me to the Prophet and she had made a garment for the lower half of my body with half of her headdress and (with the other half) she covered my upper body and said: "Oh, Messenger of Allah! Here is my son Anas; I have brought him to you to serve you. Invoke Allah's blessings upon him". Thereupon, he said: "Oh, Allah! Increase him in wealth and offspring.

The effect of this blessed supplication was profound upon the life of Anas, as we shall see.

The Effect of this Blessed Supplication

There is no doubt that the supplication of the Messenger of Allah was answered and there is not a Muslim who doubts it. Allah, the Most Glorified, the Most High's response to the supplication of the Messenger of Allah, for Anas was a practical proof which was witnessed by the people and recorded in history; we have seen how Umm Sulaim brought Anas and asked the Messenger of Allah to supplicate Allah for him and how the Messenger of Allah supplicated for him, saying: "Oh,

Allah! Increase him in wealth and offspring." Anas said: "By Allah, my wealth is great and my children and grandchildren number around a hundred today."

Anas also said regarding this same supplication that Umm Sulaim said: "Oh, Messenger of Allah! Anas is your servant. Please supplicate Allah for him," and he said: "Increase his wealth and his offspring," And some of my family informed me that more than a hundred of my offspring had been buried."

He used to say: "I am the wealthiest of the Ansar and I was informed by my daughter, Aminah, that a hundred and twenty-nine of my offspring were buried up to the time when Al-Hajjaj became Governor of Basrah."

Another effect of this blessed supplication was that he had an orchard which bore fruit twice a year and in this orchard, he had basil, which gave off the smell of musk.

Karamah

The miracles which the Messenger of Allah was given are known as Mu'jizat, while those given by Allah to His righteous slaves are known as Karamat. And they are glad tidings given to His Awliya' and a confirmation for them that they are following the right path.

Allah, the Most Glorified, the Most

High favored Anas with Karamat, among them one was narrated by Thabit, who said that he was with Anas, and his servant came and said: "Oh, Abu Hamzah! Our land has become dry." So he stood up and performed ablution for prayer, then went to the open countryside and offered a two-Rak'ah prayer and then supplicated Allah. I saw the clouds gathering, then it rained until it filled everything and when the rain had stopped, Anas sent for one of his family members and said: "See where the rain has reached." He looked and saw that none of the land had been neglected by the rain except a little and that was in the summer.

His Worship and His Piety

Anas was a devout man, pious and fearing Allah, the Most Glorified, the Most High much, careful to do that which pleases Allah and careful to abstain from that which causes His Wrath. It was a part of his nature to love goodness and this natural love for goodness was supported by the fact that he grew up in an environment of strong and pure faith; this was because he spent his childhood and a great part of his boyhood and early manhood in the house of the Prophet, imbibing from that pure spring, which was neither polluted nor muddled. He found there the best role model to imitate and he did so. This imitation was based upon two great things: His conviction of the truth of the Message and his love for the Messenger; and

imitation which is based upon conviction and love lasts, as opposed to imitation based upon compulsion, which ceases when there is no supervision.

So it is not strange for one who lived and was brought up close to the most devoted of worshippers among mankind, the most abstemious of them, the most God-fearing of people and the most zealous of them in seeking Allah's Pleasure it is not strange at all that he should also be a devoted worshipper, abstemious, God-fearing and zealous in seeking Allah's Pleasure, for he imbibed these qualities from their pure source from the Messenger of Allah.

It is reported on the authority of Thumamah bin 'Abdullah bin Anas that he said: "Anas would pray and he would remain standing for a long time, until the skin on his feet split."

Ibn Sirin, who was the closest companion of Anas, used to say: "He was the best of people in praying, regardless of whether he was at home or on a journey."

Abu Hurairah said: "I have not seen anyone whose prayer resembled more closely to that of the Messenger of Allah than Ibn Umm Sulaim (i.e., Anas)."

So, Anas was not concerned only with the quantity of the acts of worship, but also that they should conform to the manner of the Messenger of Allah's worship. And who knew better just how

the Messenger of Allah used to worship than Anas, who lived in his house and served him? Indeed, he used to say: "Take from me, for I took from the Messenger of Allah who took from Allah, the All-Mighty, the All-Powerful and you will not find anyone more reliable than I."

An act of worship which is innovatory might cause the one who performs it to be far from Allah, when he is seeking closeness to Him.

He was extremely fearful of invalidating his deeds; Salih bin Ibrahim bin 'Abdur-Rahman bin 'Awf said that Anas came to them one Friday while they were in a house belonging to one of the wives of the Prophet, and he spoke saying: Mah! "Then when the prayer began, he said: "I fear that I may have invalidated my Friday prayer by saying Mah to you."

Due to his zealousness in practicing obedience to Allah and his fear of committing sin, Anas used to speak little, for the Messenger of Allah spoke little and he used to advise the Companions to guard their tongues, saying: "Whoever speaks much, makes a lot of noise and whoever makes a lot of noise, commits a lot of sin and whoever commits a lot of sin is deserving of the Fire." And Anas was a pupil of the Messenger of Allah and he used to emulate him in that.

It is reported on the authority of Abu Ghalib that: "I have not seen anyone

more reserved in speech than Anas bin Malik."

Al-Hariri said: "Anas assumed his Ihram from Dhat 'Irq and we did not hear him speak except to mention Allah, the All-Mighty, the All-Powerful until he had left the state of Ihram and he said to me: "Oh, my nephew! That is how Ihram should be."

Anas was not only careful that his own acts of worship should conform to the example of the Messenger of Allah but he also desired this blessing for all the Muslims and it pained him to see any differing or departure from the practice of the Messenger of Allah.

It is reported on the authority of Az-Zuhri that he visited Anas bin Malik in Damascus and he was weeping, so Az-Zuhri said: "What causes you to weep?" He replied: "I did not recognize anything of what the Messenger of Allah and his Companions used to practice except the prayer and you have innovated in that."

Anas would seek Allah's reward in every way possible; he used to fast much and when he became old and unable to fast, he would prepare food and feed the needy.

It is reported on the authority of Ayub that he said: Anas became too weak to fast and so he prepared a bowl of Tharid and invited thirty needy persons and fed them. ■

(To be continued)

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Around the World

India, Qatar Elevate Ties to Strategic Partnership

Qatar, a major energy supplier to India, signed an agreement to elevate India-Qatar relationship to the level of a strategic partnership, officials here said.

The Ministry of External Affairs announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the visiting Emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, discussed multiple issues, including the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict in the Gaza Strip. Both sides are also exploring the possibility of finalising a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

“Strategic partnership elevates the present state of bilateral relation to the strategic level. We are looking at deepening cooperation in the fields of trade, investment, energy, security as well as in the regional and international fora,” said Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary (CPV&OIA) while briefing the media following the bilateral discussion. The two sides also signed a double taxation avoidance treaty.

“India and GCC are negotiating about having an FTA. Both India and Qatar are (also) exploring the signing of a FTA in the future,” said Mr. Chatterjee, announcing that India is considering going ahead with a bilateral FTA with Qatar as discussion for an India-GCC FTA continues.

The Indian side also said that the strategic partnership would have a security component, though a clear timeline for such a process was not articulated.

Bilateral Trade

A total of 38 Qatari entities representing retail, finance, and energy sector participated in the deliberations where the two sides resolved to double bilateral trade to \$28 billion.

The visit also presented a challenge for both sides, as Purnendu Tiwary, an ex- Indian Navy commander, remains in Qatari custody, even though seven other detainees from the same 2022 case were repatriated in February 2024.

“His matter still remains subjudice in the local courts,” said Mr. Chatterjee elaborating on the

condition of Commander Tiwary. The Hindu had reported that the seven former Indian navy officials who returned in February 2024 has written to the Qatari authorities seek repatriation of Commander Tiwary.

Mr. Chatterjee informed that the Indian diaspora is the largest working force in Qatar and that at present around 600 Indians are in Qatari prisons. “About 85 Indians have received such pardons during 2024,” he said, highlighting that Qatar has the provision of granting pardon.

India already has now signed strategic partnerships with Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia within the Gulf Cooperation Council member states.

The official also confirmed that the situation in the West Asian region featured in the official talks saying, “both sides conveyed their mutual positions on Israel-Hamas issue. India conveyed its own position, the Qatari side conveyed their own position.”

The visit of the Qatari Emir has drawn attention as it is being held just two days prior to the five Arab states summit in the Saudi capital Riyadh which will take up the new proposals from the United States following the arrival of President Donald Trump. Mr. Trump’s proposal that the Palestinians of the region should be shifted out to neighbouring countries like Egypt and Jordan has drawn attention. India has not so far made its position on this new approach. MEA officials also avoided giving a clear answer to this approach which has drawn criticism as it would tantamount to ethnic cleansing.

India supports two-state solution in bringing an end to the Israel-Palestinian crisis and had welcomed the ceasefire that currently holds that was announced shortly before the swearing-in ceremony of President Trump on January 20.

The Qatari side also participated in a Joint Business Forum which drew participation of top business entities of Qatari and Indian sides.■

(The Hindu)

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