

Ramaḍān Tips!

By Riyaz Ibrahim

All praise belongs to Allāh, and may the choicest salutations and blessings be upon the Final Prophet, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh and his family, as is the right of blessings to be invoked upon them.

Could this be your last Ramaḍān? The inevitable (death)! Beautifully illustrated by an Arab poet:

Thumma maḍat al-sunūn wa ahlukā ...

fa ka'annahā wa ka'annahum aḥlāmu ...

*Then the years passed by and so did their dwellers.
As if they (the years) and those (the dwellers of those years), were dreams.*

The young will just remember you the same way you remember those before you...

Islam is compatible to every age and era, and is timeless. The more we become familiar with it, the more modern we shall become.

Islam is also a moderate religion. The more we adhere to its fundamentals, the more moderate we shall become.

The many laws of Islam that are underpinned by key principles are in place to help allow us to live a calm and peaceful existence, rather than govern and subjugate us. Likewise, Ramaḍān is a month which helps one comprehend the true nature of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, for they are terms that go beyond food and consumables. They encompass earnings, behaviour, conduct, comportment and so much more.

Ramaḍān is the month of the Qur'ān, and the great Ḥadīth Scholar (*muḥaddith al-ʿaṣr*), Shaykh Khalīl Aḥmad Sahāranpūrī  would lay great emphasis on this aspect. Ramaḍān is the month of fasting - and not feasting. Ramaḍān is the month of mercy. Ramaḍān is an opportunity for you and I to become closer to the One Who created us. It's a chance to reflect, learn and aspire to become better human beings.

Will Ramaḍān 2014 be a life-changer and elevate you to a whole new level or will it be another missed opportunity?

Through the locking up of Shayāṭīn, Allāh, Most High, has given you the ideal platform to worship Him and enhance yourself spiritually. It allows you to

gauge and measure the level of Faith, (*īmān*) and the command and control you have over your body and life. How? It is in Ramaḍān that you really find out the true state of your lower self and *nafs* and how much it leads you to sin, for Shayṭān is locked up and the fight is between you and your *nafs*, and no longer between you and him.

Fasting

Fasting has many physical, spiritual and social benefits. However, Allāh, Most High, has made fasting compulsory so that we become pious and Conscious of Him, as stated in the Qur'ān. It is primarily a replenishing and detox program of a spiritual nature for our sins and not a month to shed calories, for that may happen inevitably.

Our Beloved Prophet ﷺ says, '*Ramaḍān is a month whose first part is a mercy, the second part brings forgiveness, and the last part guarantees emancipation from the fire.*'

He ﷺ also says, '*Whoever is deprived of its good is really deprived [of something great].*'

As explained by Hadhrat Shaykh Zakariyyā ؒ, the spiritually charged hit the ground running and are a focus of Allāh's mercy as soon as Ramaḍān dawns upon them, while others, depending on the gravity and magnitude of their sins, slowly and gradually become the focus of His mercy because of the acts of worship, abstaining from sins, and sincere repentance that they engage themselves in.

Your goal is not to abstain from eating, drinking and marital relationships! Aim higher and try to abstain from all sins of the sensual organs so that both your body and soul are fasting. It is regarding this fast that Allāh, Most High, says:

'Observing of the fast is for me, and I will become the reward of it.'

Guarding the tongue and gaze is of extreme importance. Those who do not guard their gaze, the sweetness of *īmān* is taken away from them. As an aside, many seekers of sacred knowledge (*ilm*) are unable to retain what they have studied through many years of hard work as a result of not guarding their gaze (a separate topic).

Even if you were to commit a sin, for we are all persistent sinners, regret, repent and create a resolve not to perpetrate that sin ever again.

Imam Zarnūjī ؒ, student of Imām Burhān al-Dīn Marghīnānī ؒ - author of the famous Ḥanafī fiqh manual, *Al-Hidāyah*, states:

'The best way of improving the memory is to strive, be punctual, eat less,

perform ṣalāh at night [Tahajjud] and recite the Qur'ān.'

Are they not the very things we are commanded to do in the month of Ramaḍān?

It is worth noting that the blessed practice of our Beloved Prophet ﷺ was to go into seclusion in the Cave of Hira long before he received messengership (*risālah*). This spiritual retreat (*i'tikāf*) in the Cave of Hira would continue in Ramaḍān. *I'tikāf* of the whole month was a *sunnah* of his, although *i'tikāf* of the last ten days is an emphasised *sunnah*.

Exegetes, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī and Qatādah ؓ, are of the opinion that our Beloved Prophet was ﷺ blessed with messengership on a Monday which fell in the month of Ramaḍān. The general opinion is that it was the month of Rabī' 'l-Awwal.

Qur'ān

There is no better companion than the Qur'ān in the month of Ramaḍān and throughout the year. In every word, there is light, and in every letter there is goodness. That is the *ni'mah* and blessing of the Qur'ān.

I once came across this quote (in Arabic) and how true it is: 'I have not seen a friend who raises his friend like the Qur'ān does. So glad tidings for he who takes the Qur'ān as an intimate friend.'

Our *mashā'ikh*, despite their many engagements, would (and still do) complete one or two Qur'ān readings daily!

The Qur'ān was revealed from the Preserved Tablet to the first sky in one go in Ramaḍān; thereafter, it was revealed in the form of Divine Revelation to our Beloved Prophet ﷺ over a period of twenty-three years during which Sayyidunā Jibra'īl ؑ visited him on more than 24,000 occasions.

Just as our bodies need food and drink, spiritual nourishment is as important, if not more, for the body is like a car, the heart its engine, hence it needs regular oiling through *dhikr*, washed with *istighfār* and polished through Qur'ān and Durūd.

Shaykh Mawlānā Ḥasan al-Basri ؓ used to say, 'Whoever wishes to know who he is, let him present himself to the Qur'ān.' It categorises both the good and the bad.

Ḥafṣah ibn Sīrīn ؓ - sister of Imām Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn ؓ - had memorised the entire Qur'ān with all its meanings by the age of twelve. Our Muslim sisters (and brothers) can do the same and much more. There are many truly

fascinating and inspiring accounts from the Formative, Classical and Modern period detailing how women excelled in both Qur'ān and Ḥadīth readings and study.

My humble advise for one is to split their Qur'ān time into two:

1. Spend upto 60% of the time reading the Qur'ān. Try to complete as many Qur'ān readings as possible - a non-Hafiz should target three chapters minimum everyday in Ramaḍān.

2. Expend the rest of the time in reading an acknowledged translation of the Qur'ān to give you some sense of understanding. We claim to love Allāh yet the Qur'ānic text, which is akin to a personal letter from Allāh, we fail to register our interest in it by not learning the language it's written in or, in the least, understanding it through another medium.

In addition to this, it is imperative that you learn the exegeses (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'ān in the presence of sound male and female scholars to gain an insight and a richer understanding.

P.S. Hadhrat Shaykh Mawlānā Yusuf Motala's D.B. rendition in Urdu, namely *Aḍwā' 'l-Bayān*, in my opinion, is the most lucid, easy to grasp translation, penned in a simple yet captivating style – now available with Arabic commentary penned by the Shaykh himself.

The soon to be published Qur'ān translation by Shaykh Dr. Mawlana Mahmood Chandia D.B is a very reliable rendering of the Qur'ān into the English language.

Du'ā' and Repentance

Supplicate Allāh, Most High, as much as possible. Our Beloved Prophet ﷺ says, '*The du'ā' made by a fasting person at the time of opening his fast (iḥṭār) is accepted.*'

This is why Sayyidunā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar R would assemble his family members around him at the time of *iḥṭār* and supplicate.

There are many *du'ās* one could and should supplicate via, but one *jāmi'* and concise *du'ā'* to learn is as follows:

Allāhumma innī as'aluka 'l-'afwa wa 'l-'āfiyah fī 'l-dunyā wa 'l-ākhirah

O Allāh, I beseech You for forgiveness, 'āfiyah, and (firmness in) faith in this world and the hereafter.'

Quṭb al-Irshād, Shaykh Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī RH explains the word '*āfiyah*' as comprising of three things:

1. The ability to follow the Sunnah
2. To be given sustenance and *rizq* on time
3. Healthy breathing, i.e. good health

What more do you really need?

It is to your benefit that, as much as you pray for yourself, you pray for others too, especially for the suffering Ummah. Take out a moment in your *du'ās* for those innocent orphans, blameless children, widows and Muslims who have lost everything through no fault of their own, and just because they are Muslims.

It is because of our shortfalls and sins that that our *du'ās* are not accepted, yet when one makes *du'ā'* for others, the angel says, '*Wa laka 'l-mithl - May the same be for you.*' *Subhānallāh!*

Hadhrat Mawlānā Idrīs Kandhlawī رحمته writes: '*Just as it is beyond us to truly comprehend and grasp Allāh's attributes in their true manner, likewise, we are unable to fathom how close Allāh is to us when we supplicate.*'

Also, recite *Durūd* and *istighfār* throughout the day as both wipe sins and attract Allāh's mercy.

Ibn al-Qayyim رحمته says: '*Istighfār is a blessing from Al-Ghaffār. Whoever seeks it continuously will see its effects on his soul, wealth and children.*

And as the poet says:

*There is no shedding of tears upon the one who dies,
Shedding of tears is for repentance when it is neglected.*

Spend the month of Ramaḍān wisely and you will gain its blessings and *barakah* which you will feel throughout the year and will be engulfed by Allāh's mercy, resulting in wiping of sins. How unfortunate is he who is not pardoned even after seeing the whole month of Ramaḍān!

In the end, you have a choice: Strive and be among those who take away with them abundant blessings and walk away clean and pure at the end of the month or be from those for whom Ramaḍān came and went and made no difference whatsoever! Sayyidunā Jibra'īl عليه السلام cursed the one who did not value the blessed month of Ramaḍān and did not do enough for Allāh, Most High to pardon him. To this, our Beloved Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said '*Āmīn*' - therefore, choose wisely.

Rewards of all good deeds are multiplied manifolds in this blessed month, therefore, try not to miss even the non-emphasised *sunnah* prayers and *nafl*

prayers.

I will end with a beautiful Ḥadith al-Qudsī: *‘O Son of Adam! Take time out for My worship and I will fill your heart with richness, and I will remove your poverty, whereas, if you don't do so, I will fill your hands with busy schedules and I won't remove your neediness.’*

May Allāh, Most High, grant us all the ability to make the most of this blessed month, engage in his worship as much as possible and gain purity from our sins. May the atmosphere be filled with the spirit of mirth and love, and bring our way contentment that stays with us through the days ahead. May He give us the strength to rectify ourselves and take the steps to change our lives and direction. May this auspicious month be the harbinger of joy, peace, prosperity, happiness and spiritually uplifting for all of us. Āmīn!

This advice, though presented through personal pronouns, for effect, is very much aimed at myself first and foremost.

I end with humbly requesting you readers to keep me in your auspicious *du‘ās* throughout Ramadān and beyond.

Ramaḍān Karīm to you all!