

From the
Risale-i Nur Collection 2

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Letters

1928-1932

The Second Section, which is the Second Treatise

On the Month of Ramadan

[There having been a brief discussion of 'the marks of Islam' at the end of the First Section, the most brilliant and splendid of the marks, Ramadan the Noble, is discussed in this Second Section. This Section consists of Nine Points, which explain nine of the numerous instances of wisdom in the month of Ramadan.]

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

It was the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the standard to discern true from false.¹

● FIRST POINT

The fast of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, and it is one of the greatest of the marks and observances of Islam.

There are many purposes and instances of wisdom in the fast of Ramadan which look to both God Almighty's dominicality, and to man's social life, his personal life and the training of his instinctual soul, and to his gratitude for Divine bounties. One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting from the point of view of God Almighty's dominicality is as follows:

God Almighty created the face of the earth in the form of a table laden with bounties, and arranged on the table every sort of bounty in a form of *From whence he does not expect*,² in this way stating the perfection of His dominicality and His mercifulness and compassionateness. Human beings are unable to discern clearly the reality of this situation while in the sphere of causes, under the veil of heedlessness, and they sometimes forget it. However, during the month of Ramadan, the people of belief suddenly become like a well drawn-up army. As sunset approaches, they

1. Qur'an, 2: 185.

2. Qur'an, 65:3.

display a worshipful attitude as though, having been invited to the Pre-Eternal Monarch's banquet, they are awaiting the command of "Fall to and help yourselves!" They are responding to that compassionate, illustrious, and universal mercy with comprehensive, exalted, and orderly worship. Do you think those who do not participate in such elevated worship and noble bounties are worthy to be called human beings?

● SECOND POINT

One of the many instances of wisdom in the fast of the blessed month of Ramadan with respect to thankfulness for God Almighty's bounties is as follows:

As is stated in the First Word, a price is required for the foods a tray-bearer brings from a royal kitchen. But, to give a tip to the tray-bearer, and to suppose those priceless bounties to be valueless and not to recognize the one who bestowed them would be the greatest foolishness.

God Almighty has spread innumerable sorts of bounties over the face of the earth for mankind, in return for which He wishes thanks, as the price of those bounties. The apparent causes and possessors of the bounties are like tray-bearers. We pay a certain price to them and are indebted to them, and even though they do not merit it, are over-respectful and grateful to them. Whereas the True Bestower of Bounties is infinitely more deserving of thanks than those causes which are merely the means for the bounty. To thank Him, then, is to recognize that the bounties come directly from Him; it is to appreciate their worth and to perceive one's own need for them.

Fasting in Ramadan, then, is the key to a true, sincere, extensive, and universal thankfulness. For at other times of the year, most of those who are not in difficult circumstances do not realize the value of many bounties since they do not experience real hunger. Those whose stomachs are full and especially if they are rich, do not understand the degree of bounty there is in a piece of dry bread. But when it is time to break the fast, the sense of taste testifies that the dry bread is a most valuable Divine bounty in the eyes of a believer. During Ramadan, everyone from the monarch to the destitute, manifests a sort of gratitude through understanding the value of those bounties.

Furthermore, since eating is prohibited during the day, they will say: "Those bounties do not belong to me. I am not free to eat them, for they are another's property and gift. I await his command." They will recognize the bounty to be bounty and so will be giving thanks. Thus, fasting in this way is in many respects like a key to gratitude; gratitude being man's fundamental duty.

● THIRD POINT

One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting from the point of view of man's social life is as follows:

Human beings have been created differently with regard to their livelihoods. As a consequence of the difference, God Almighty invites the rich to assist the poor, so that through the hunger experienced in fasting, the rich can truly understand the pains and hunger which the poor suffer. If there was no fasting, there would be many self-indulgent rich unable to perceive just how grievous is hunger and poverty and how needy of compassion are those who suffer them.

Compassion for one's fellow men is an essential of true thankfulness. Whoever a person is, there will always be someone poorer than himself in some respect. He is enjoined to be compassionate towards that person. If he was not himself compelled to suffer hunger, he would be unable give the person—by means of compassion—the help and assistance which he is obliged to offer. And even if he was able, it would be deficient, for he would not have truly experienced the state of hunger himself.

● FOURTH POINT

One instance of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan with respect to training the instinctual soul is as follows:

The instinctual soul wants to be free and independent, and considers itself to be thus. According to the dictates of its nature, it even desires an imaginary dominicality and to act as it pleases. It does not want to admit that it is being sustained and trained through innumerable bounties. Especially if it possesses wealth and power in this world, and if heedlessness also encourages it, it will devour God's bounties like a usurping, thieving animal.

Thus, in the month of Ramadan, the instinctual soul of everyone, from the richest to the poorest, may understand that it does not own itself, but is totally owned; that it is not free, but is a slave. It understands that if it receives no command, it is unable to do the simplest and easiest thing, it cannot even stretch out its hand towards water. Its imaginary dominicality is therefore shattered; it performs its worship and begins to offer thanks, its true duty.

● FIFTH POINT

One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan from the point of view of improving the conduct of the instinctual soul and giving up its rebellious habits is as follows:

The human soul forgets itself through heedlessness. It cannot see the

utter powerlessness, want, and deficiency within itself and it does not wish to see them. And it does not think of just how weak it is, and how subject to transience and to disasters, nor of the fact that it consists merely of flesh and bones, which quickly decline and are dispersed.

Simply, it assaults the world as though it possessed a body made of steel and imagined itself to be undying and eternal. It hurls itself onto the world with intense greed and voracity and passionate attachment and love. It is captivated by anything that gives its pleasure or that benefits it. Moreover, it forgets its Creator Who sustains it with perfect compassion, and it does not think of the results of its life and its life in the hereafter. Indeed, it wallows in dissipation and misconduct.

However, fasting in the month of Ramadan awakens even the most heedless and obstinate to their weakness, impotence, and want. By means of hunger, they think of their stomachs; they understand the need therein. They realize how unsound are their weak bodies, and perceive how needy they are for kindness and compassion. So they abandon the soul's pharaoh-like despotism, and through recognizing their utter impotence and want, perceive a desire to take refuge at the Divine Court. And they prepare themselves to knock at the door of mercy with the hands of thankfulness. So long as heedlessness has not destroyed their hearts, that is.

● SIXTH POINT

One of the many instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan from the point of view of the revelation of the All-Wise Qur'an, and with respect to the fact that the month of Ramadan was the most important time in its revelation, is as follows:

Since the All-Wise Qur'an was revealed in the month of Ramadan, to shun the lower demands of the soul and trivialities and to resemble the angelic state by abstaining from food and drink in order to greet that heavenly address in the best manner, is to attain to a holy state. And to read and listen to the Qur'an as though it was just revealed, to listen to the Divine address in it as if it was being revealed that very instant, to listen to that address as though hearing it from God's Noble Messenger (Upon whom be blessings and peace), indeed, from the Angel Gabriel, or from the Pre-Eternal Speaker Himself, is to attain to that same holy state. To act in this way is to act as an interpreter and to cause others to listen to it and in some degree to demonstrate the wisdom in the Qur'an's revelation.

Indeed, it is as if the world of Islam becomes a mosque during the month of Ramadan. In every corner of that mighty mosque millions of those who know the whole Qur'an by heart cause the dwellers on the earth to hear the heavenly address. Each Ramadan displays the verse *It*

was the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was bestowed from on high in luminous shining manner. It proves that Ramadan is the month of the Qur'an. Some of the members of the vast congregation listen to the reciters with reverence, while others read it themselves.

Following the appetites of the base instinctual soul while in a sacred mosque that is such, and quitting that luminous condition through eating and drinking, is truly loathsome and makes such a person the target of the aversion and disgust of the congregation in the mosque. In the same way, people who oppose those who fast during Ramadan are to the same extent the target of the aversion and disgust of the whole world of Islam.

● SEVENTH POINT

One of the many instances of wisdom in the fast of Ramadan with respect to mankind's gain and profit, who comes to this world in order to cultivate and trade for the hereafter, is as follows:

The reward for actions in the month of Ramadan is a thousandfold. According to Hadith, each word of the All-Wise Qur'an has ten merits; each is counted as ten merits and will yield ten fruits in Paradise. While during Ramadan, each word bears not ten fruits but a thousand, and verses like *Ayat al-Kursi*³ thousands for each word, and on Fridays in Ramadan it is even more. And on the Night of Power, each word is counted as thirty thousand merits.

Indeed, the All-Wise Qur'an, each of whose words yield thirty thousand eternal fruits, is like a luminous Tree of Tuba that gains for believers in Ramadan millions of those eternal fruits. So, come and look at this sacred, eternal profitable trade, then consider it and understand the infinite loss of those who do not appreciate the value of those words.

To put it simply, the month of Ramadan is an extremely profitable display and market for the trade of the hereafter. It is an extremely fertile piece of land for the crops of the hereafter. For the growth and flourishing of actions it is like April showers in the spring. It is like a brilliant holy festival for the parade of mankind's worship in the face of the sovereignty of Divine dominicality. Since it is thus, mankind has been charged with fasting in order not to heedlessly indulge the animal needs of the instinctual soul like eating and drinking, nor to indulge the appetites lustfully and in trivialities. For, by temporarily rising above animality and quitting the calls of this world, man approaches the angelic state and enters upon the trade of the hereafter. And by fasting, he approaches the state of the hereafter and that of a spirit appearing in

3. Qur'an, 2:255.

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bodily form. It is as if man then becomes a sort of mirror reflecting the Eternally Besought One. Indeed, the month of Ramadan comprises and gains a permanent and eternal life in this fleeting world and brief transient life.

Certainly, a single Ramadan can produce fruits equal to that of a life-time of eighty years. The fact that, according to the Qur'an, the Night of Power is more auspicious than a thousand months is a decisive proof of this.

For example, a monarch may declare certain days to be festivals during his reign, or perhaps once a year. Either on his accession to the throne or on some other days which reflect a glittering manifestation of his sovereignty. On those days, he favours his subjects, not within the general sphere of the law, but with his special bounties and favours, with his presence without veil and his wondrous activities. And he favours with his especial regard and attention those of his nation who are completely loyal and worthy .

In the same way, the All-Glorious Monarch of eighteen thousand worlds, Who is the Sovereign of Pre-Eternity and Post-Eternity, revealed in Ramadan the illustrious decree of the All-Wise Qur'an, which looks to the eighteen thousand worlds. It is a requirement of wisdom, then, that Ramadan should be like special Divine festival, a dominical display, and a spiritual gathering. Since Ramadan is such festival, God has commanded man to fast, in order to disengage him to a degree from base and animal activities.

The most excellent fasting is to make the human senses and organs, like the eyes, ears, heart, and thoughts, fast together with the stomach. That is, to withdraw them from all unlawful things and from trivia, and to urge each of them to their particular worship.

For example, to ban the tongue from lying, back-biting, and obscene language and to make it fast. And to busy it with activities like reciting the Qur'an, praying, glorifying God's Names, asking for God's blessings on the Prophet Muhammad (Upon whom be blessings and peace), and seeking forgiveness for sins. And for example, to prevent the eyes looking at members of the opposite sex outside the stipulated degrees of kinship, and the ears from hearing harmful things, and to use the eyes to take lessons and the ears to listen to the truth and to the Qur'an, is to make other organs fast too. As a matter of fact, since the stomach is the largest factory, if it has an enforced holiday from work through fasting, the other small workshops will be made to follow it easily.

● EIGHTH POINT

One of the many instances of wisdom in Ramadan from the point of view of man's personal life is as follows:

It is a healing physical and spiritual diet of the most important kind. When man's instinctual soul eats and drinks just as it pleases, it is both harmful for man's physical life from the medical point of view, and when it hurls itself on everything it encounters without considering whether it is licit or illicit, it quite simply poisons his spiritual life. Further, it is difficult for such a soul to obey the heart and the spirit. It wilfully takes the reins into its own hands, and then man cannot ride it, it rather rides man. But by means of fasting in Ramadan, it becomes accustomed to a sort of diet. It tries to discipline itself and learns to listen to commands.

Furthermore, it will not be attracting illness to that miserable, weak stomach by cramming it with food before the previous consignment has been digested. And by abandoning even licit actions as it is commanded, it will acquire the ability to listen to the commands of the Shari'a and the reason, and so to avoid illicit actions. It will try not to destroy his spiritual life.

Moreover, the great majority of mankind frequently suffer from hunger. Man, therefore, needs hunger and discipline, which are training for patience and endurance. Fasting in Ramadan is patient endurance of a period of hunger that continues for fifteen hours, or for twenty-four if the pre-dawn meal is not eaten, and it is a discipline and a training. That is to say, fasting is also a cure for impatience and lack of endurance, which double man's afflictions.

Furthermore, the factory of the stomach has many workers. And many of the human organs are connected to it. If the instinctual soul does not have a rest from activity during the day for a month, it makes the factory's workers and those organs forget their particular duties. It makes them busy with itself so that they remain under its tyranny. Also, it confuses the rest of the organs in the human body with the clangour and steam of the factory's machinery. It continuously attracts their attention to itself, making them temporarily forget their exalted duties. It is because of this that for centuries those closest to God have accustomed themselves to discipline and to eating and drinking little in order to be perfected.

However, through fasting in Ramadan the factory's workers understand that they were not created for the factory only. While the rest of the organs, instead of delighting in the lowly amusements of the factory, take

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pleasure in angelic and spiritual amusements, and fix their gazes on them. It is for this reason that in Ramadan the believers experience enlightenment, fruitfulness, and spiritual joys which differ according to their degrees. Their subtle faculties, such as the heart, spirit, and intellect, make great progress and advancement in that blessed month by means of fasting. They laugh with innocent joy inspite of the stomach's weeping.

● NINTH POINT

One of the instances of wisdom in fasting in Ramadan with regard to shattering the instinctual soul's imaginary dominicality and making known its worship through pointing out its impotence is as follows:

The instinctual soul does not want to recognize its Sustainer; it wants its own lordship, like Pharaoh. However much torment it suffers, that character remains in it. It is however destroyed through hunger. And so, fasting in Ramadan strikes direct blows at the soul's pharaoh-like front, shattering it. It demonstrates its impotence, weakness, and want. It makes it realize that it is a slave.

Among the narrations of Hadith is the following: "God Almighty said to the instinctual soul: 'What am I and what are you?' The soul replied: 'I am myself and You are Yourself.' So He punished it and cast it into Hell, then asked it again. Again it replied: 'I am myself and You are Yourself.' However He punished it, it did not give up its egoism. Finally He punished it with hunger. That is, He left it hungry. Then again He asked it: 'Who am I and who are you?' And the soul replied: 'You are my Compassionate Sustainer and I am your impotent slave.'"

O God! Grant blessings and peace to our master Muhammad, that will be pleasing to You and fulfilment of his truth to the number of the merits of the words of the Qur'an in the month of Ramadan, and to his Family and Companions, and grant them peace.

*Limitless in His glory is your Sustainer, the Lord of Almightyness, [exalted] above anything that men may devise by way of definition! * And peace be upon all His message-bearers. * And all praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of All the Worlds!⁴*

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APOLOGY: This Second Section was written at speed when both myself and the rough-copy scribe were ill; it is bound therefore to contain disorder and defects. We await from our brothers that they look on it with tolerance. They may correct it as they think fit.

4. Qur'an, 37:180-2.