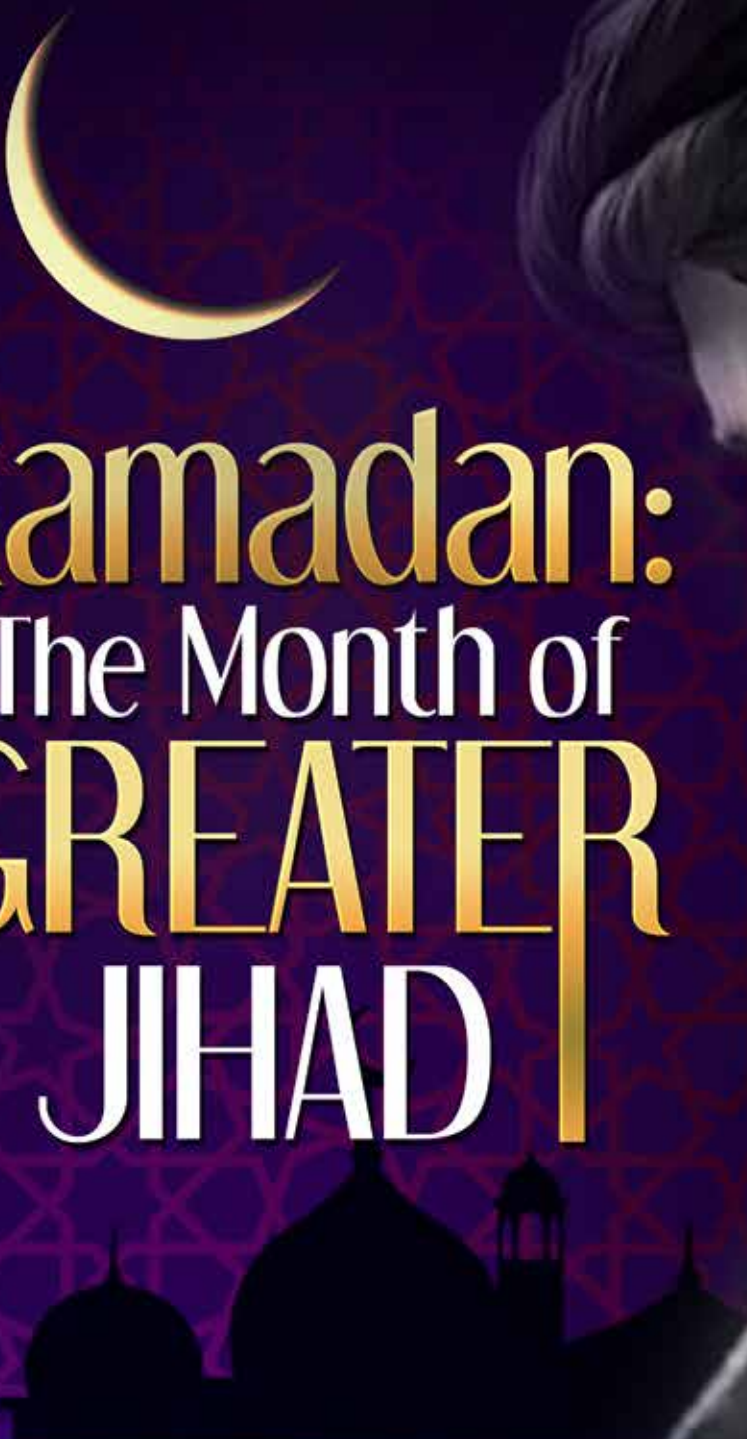


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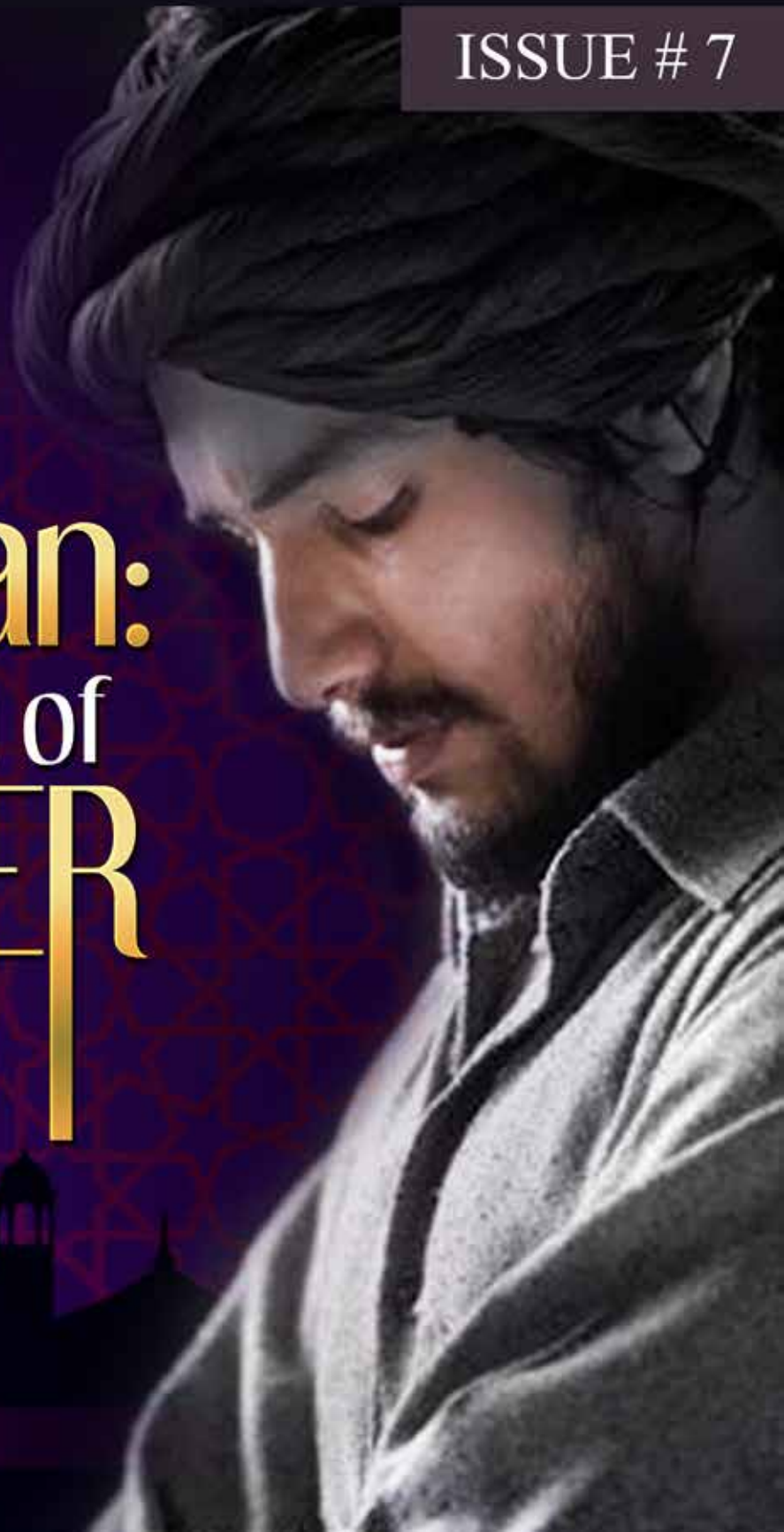
Egypt's Dar al-Ifta Combats Extremism

ISSUE # 7

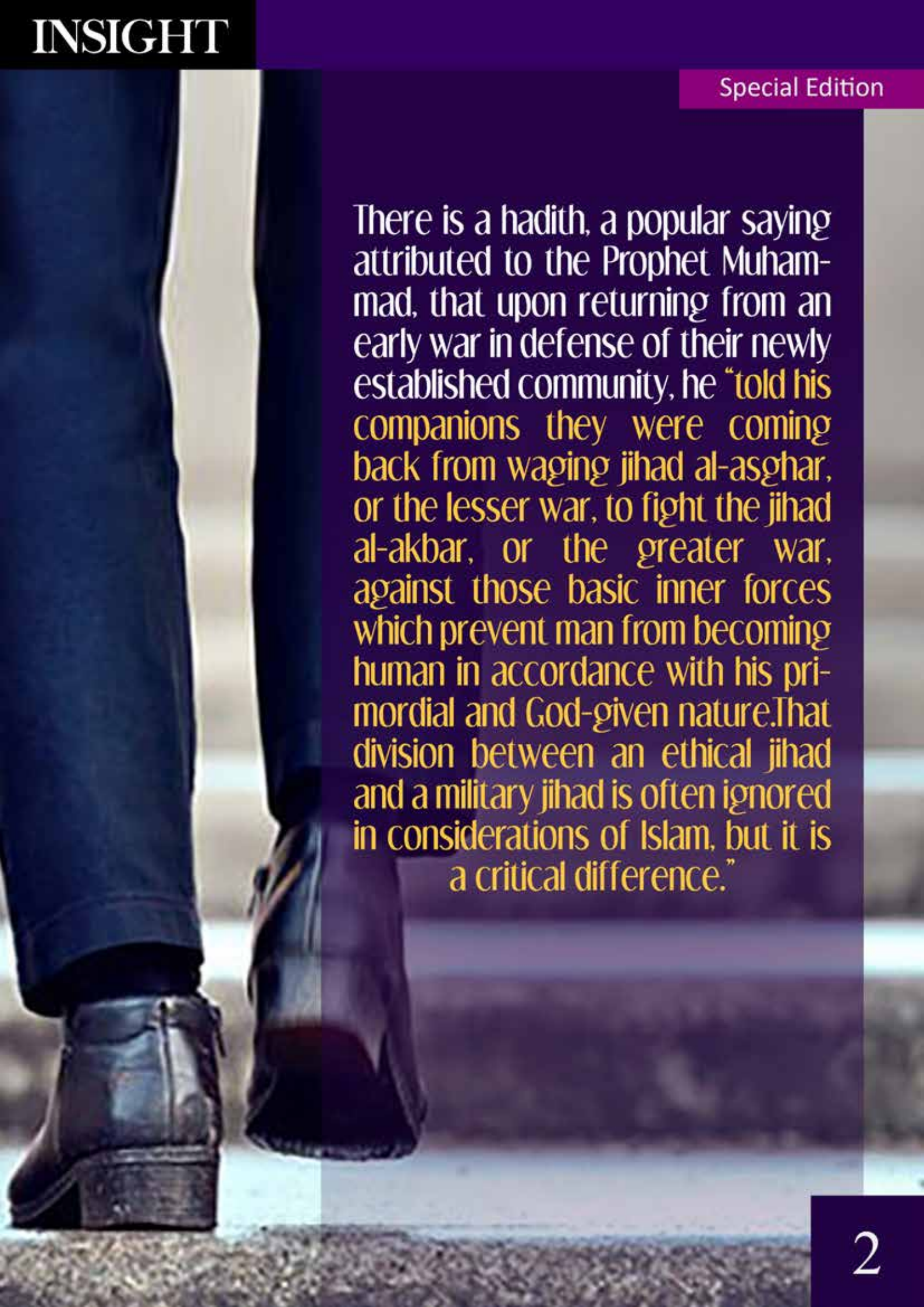


Ramadan: The Month of GREATER JIHAD

Special Edition



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There is a hadith, a popular saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, that upon returning from an early war in defense of their newly established community, he “told his companions they were coming back from waging jihad al-asghar, or the lesser war, to fight the jihad al-akbar, or the greater war, against those basic inner forces which prevent man from becoming human in accordance with his primordial and God-given nature. That division between an ethical jihad and a military jihad is often ignored in considerations of Islam, but it is a critical difference.”



THE REASONS

given for the above, in regards to Jihad against the desires and Satan as being Jihad Akbar, are as follows:

- Its field of struggle is unlimited.
- It is timeless and boundless.
- This struggle is hard because its essence is man against himself.
- The enemy is unseen and cannot be detected by the five senses.

How does Jihad relate to this holy month of Qur'anic revelation and concepts of abstinence?

Where does the answer lie in this specific strain of jihad being named jihad al-nafs?

How does the notion of jihad al-nafs differ from the popular notion of jihad?

In fact, in the current climate, should we even link any concept of jihad with the sacred?

In this special issue, we are attempting to explore to our readers the deeper concept of Jihad and how it relates to the long month of fast.

As a matter of fact, there would be no Islam, no understanding of Islam as a religion as a concept of life and death without understanding Jihad.

And if we come back to the Arabic root of the word, it means effort, but in fact, it's not this what we are talking about.

If we want to understand jihad, we have to understand that in fact it is a two way process.

The first step is the way you resist the bad temptation, the dark side of yourself.

And the second is how do you reform it? So it is resistance and reform.

It means in fact that what you are trying to do is to resist something which is natural, to reach a point where you go from natural to spiritual by this resistance and in fact during the month of Ramadan what we are trying to do is to master, to control all the human side of our being to come close to divine side of our attraction, so this is the very essence of why we fast, we don't fast only for preventing ourselves, it is a discipline that we are taking to our own selves to become a better human being.


Therefore, the essence is: control your nature to become a spiritual being, and this is exactly jihad, there is no fasting if there isn't jihad al-nafts .

To come closer to ourselves, to monitor ourselves, to ponder over the meaning of our life and to express much more good dimension of our being by the way we speak, by the way we behave, by the way we serve humanity.

So, during Ramadan we prevent ourselves from the bad side to come close to God and there is something which is very important as much as we are trying to become close to God, we have to be close to the poor people, this is why also it is very important to understand everything which has to do with our spiritual life in Islam is to serve the poor and you will be closer to the Only one.

This is jihad in fact, this is the very understanding of jihad which means that by doing this, by controlling ourselves, we are trying to aspire to which is the deepest understanding, the light that is in our heart, that we are trying to experiment, to expose to by the way we are fasting.

So, the Prophet [peace and blessings be upon him] said: "Some people among you are going to get only from their fasting, they don't drink and they don't eat but in fact the deep teaching is something which has to do with make your heart open and transform yourself towards a better human being.



Ramadan: the station to DEVELOP the Greater Jihad

To claim that the act of fasting is more than mere abstention from food, drink, and intimacy with one's spouse is a cliché.

Despite being aware of this, for many of us, the daylight hours of Ramadan remain drawn-out moments of thirst and hunger.

Certainly many of us feel the spiritual ecstasy after satiating ourselves, whether it is by praying tarawīh (nightly Ramadan prayer) or enjoying qiyām (late-night prayer) at the masjid (mosque). The night has become the focal point for many, and, not to undermine its significance, most people do not appreciate the spirituality that can be enjoyed during the day. After all, it is doubtlessly easier to appreciate an act of worship when not burdened by the grueling fast. To remedy this issue who better to turn to than Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī. In his magnum opus, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī discusses the "secrets" of fasting and the method by which one can attain them and fulfill the objectives of fasting. For the sake of space, we will limit ourselves to a few points he mentions. He begins by stating that the way by which the devil influences the hearts of people is through their desires (shahawāt). Our desires, namely, are food, drink, and intimacy. It is by overcoming one's desires that one finds refuge from the devil and tranquility. Al-Ghazālī deems this point central to realizing the objectives of fasting.



Al-Ghazālī quotes
the well known hadīth (tradition) in which the
Prophet ﷺ says that God, subhanahu wa ta'ala
(exalted is He), said:

“All of the actions of the son of Adam
are for him, except for fasting. [Fast-
ing] is for me and I reward for it
[what I please] ...”



Why does God (swt) say that fasting, to the exclusion of other acts of worship, is for Him? Is not our prayer and charity for His sake as well? Al-Ghazālī writes that God (swt) has given the action of fasting an extra degree of honor, by attributing it to Himself, in two ways:

Firstly, fasting is a hidden act of worship; no one is actually able to see you fast. This fact guards one's intention from being corrupted, unlike prayer, charity and, Hajj (pilgrimage).

Secondly, fasting is an act by which one subdues the devil. Recall, the devil's capacity is only exercised via one's desires. By abstaining from food, drink, and intimacy, a Muslim is able to control his desires and hinder the effects of the devil. By defeating the devil, one aids in bringing victory to God (swt), i.e., God's religion:

"O you who have believed, if you support Allah, He will support you and plant firmly your feet" (Qu'ran 47:7).

In the commentary of al-Jalālayn, we find that bringing victory to God (swt) means bringing victory to His religion and Messenger.

After elaborating on the merits of fasting, followed by the rules of fasting, al-Ghazālī discusses the methodology by which we can realize the fruits of fasting.

Fasting is practiced at one of three levels:

- (1) the level of the lay people.
- (2) the level of the elect.
- (3) the level of the elect of the elect.

The fasting of the laity, the lowest level of fasting, involves merely following the outward rulings of fasting. Fasting at the next level up involves fasting with one's limbs (the present article will elaborate on this level as it is the most relevant). The third level of fasting involves being physically, spiritually, and intellectually occupied with one's lord without breaking consciousness from this state for even a moment. This includes fasting with one's heart and mind.

The second level of fasting involves six things:

1. Fasting with one's sight.

One should abstain from looking at things that are disliked (makrūh) or illicit (harām). This includes things that distract one's heart from the remembrance of God (swt).

2. Fasting with one's tongue.

While fasting, one should not lie, backbite, slander, use obscene language, quarrel with others, speak insincerely, or engage in idle chatter. Rather, one should try to spend more time being silent, remembering their Lord, and reciting His book.

3. Fasting with one's ears.

One should refrain from listening to things that are disliked (makrūh) or forbidden (harām). Al-Ghazālī mentions that anything which is forbidden to say is forbidden to listen to. In the Qur'ān, God juxtaposes those who engage in listening to lies with those who consume what is unlawful [5:42].

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4. Keeping the remainder of one's body parts (e.g. hands, feet) from engaging in blameworthy acts.

Hopefully this is not an issue for any of us, but speaking to such a wide audience, al-Ghazālī warns people of consuming from that which is unlawful. After all, doing so defeats the whole purpose of fasting.

5. Do not overeat.

Everyone knows they shouldn't, but we all do. Al-Ghazālī advises against overeating when it comes to breaking one's fast. After all, the point of fasting is to control one's desires. What has one gained if they end up binging in one (or several) meals and make up for what they've managed to hold off on. Moreover, as al-Ghazālī mentions, many of us deck out our dining tables with such an assortment like we are trying to eat the food pyramids of Giza. And you know someone is going to get the wrath if the samosas run out. So much for keeping the devil at bay.

6. After breaking one's fast, one should balance a feeling of hope and fear.

One should be hopeful that one's fast has been accepted by God yet also be fearful that the fast may have been lacking. In short, one should not become overly confident because the quality of one's fast will slowly dwindle. Yes, fulfilling the outward aspects of fasting will make one's act valid. But we should be concerned with more than just that, as al-Ghazālī mentions. At a higher level, in consideration of the Hereafter, we should be

concerned with the act being accepted and the objectives being fulfilled, in addition to it being valid. In al-Ghazālī's understanding, the objective of the fast is embodying one of the attributes of God, al-Samadiyya, namely, being resistant, enduring, and mastering our desires. In this way we follow the example of the angels who are above having desires.

The beauty of Ramadan is not only to be found after the sun has set. The struggles of fasting have their own share of beauty and spirituality. As al-Shaykh Shabīr Ahmad al-'Uthmānī writes in his renowned commentary of *Sahīh Muslim*, we bear the toils of fasting for the sole purpose of gaining God's pleasure.

Finally, al-Ghazālī leaves us by posing a question we should all ask ourselves. Fasting, and every act of worship included, has both an outward and inward realization. Will we be satisfied with fulfilling the outward, or will we strive towards realizing the inward beauty?





Developing Self-Control In Ramadan

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is a special month of the year for over one billion and half Muslims throughout the world. It is sometimes referred to as the “Sultan of the 11 months.”

During this month healthy adult Muslims fast, from the break of dawn until sunset. Fasting requires abstinence from eating, drinking, and intercourse during the daylight hours; that is, about an hour and a half before sunrise until sunset. An early predawn meal is recommended in the prophetic tradition, taken before dawn. At the end of the day the fast is broken with a meal called the iftar. It is the prophetic tradition to break the fast with a date, olive or some water.

Ramadan is a time of intensive worship and devotion to God, of reading the Qur'an and reflecting on its teachings, of comprehensive thanksgiving, giving to charity, practicing self-control and kindness, of training oneself to be a better person spiritually and improving relationships with others.



Fasting is not that difficult

To non-Muslims fasting in Ramadan may appear to be a time of hardship and deprivation, but that is not the experience of Muslims. There are at least five ameliorating factors that make fasting much easier than it appears. These are (1) the magic of intention, (2) the community spirit, (3) the ability of the human body to adapt, (4) social/cultural cooperation, and (5) divine help. The initial intention significantly reduces the perceived difficulty. Once one commits to fasting, it becomes much more doable and feasible. Knowing and seeing that fellow believers are fasting with you and sharing the early breakfast or the dinner with them strengthens the community spirit. Thirdly, the human body is amazingly adaptable. Within the first few days of fasting the body adapts to the new schedule and one does not feel hunger as one normally would. In communities where Muslims are a majority or a significant minority, there is assistance or cooperation offered to the fasters, such as flexible holidays and working hours. Finally, for any worshipper, there is divine help which eases the task once the worshipper has committed to doing it.

A little over a billion Muslims, from age 9 to 90 fast every year. Fasting does not prevent them from conducting their mundane work or business as usual. As a pillar of the religious life in Islam, fasting is probably the most practiced form of worship. Muslims think of Ramadan as a kind of tune-up for their spiritual lives.

The four dimensions of Ramadan

As the third “pillar,” or religious duty in Islam, fasting has many dimensions: The behavioral dimension, the religious dimension, the social dimension and the spiritual dimension.

The first is the obvious behavioral dimension. Fasting in Ramadan is a means of learning self-control. Due to a lack of preoccupation with the satisfaction of bodily appetites during the daylight hours when fasting, the spirit gains a measure of ascendancy. The soul is freed of the chains placed by carnal desires. Fasting provides a break in the cycle of rigid habits or overindulgence.

During fasting, not only the stomach, but also the tongue, eyes, ears, other limbs, and the heart and mind are equally obligated to be restrained. Just as we control our physical appetites, we also must control our negative emotions and actions. The Messenger of Islam, Muhammad, peace be upon him, expressed that fasting is not only restraining from food and drink, but that it also means refraining from impious acts. He said that if a person does not control their senses and behavior, then God does not require that person to refrain from eating. He added that if someone verbally abuses you, acts ignorantly towards you, or even hurts you, you should respond by only saying, “I am fasting; I am indeed fasting.” According to the masters of Sufism, the spiritual dimension of Islam, not only one’s organs, but also one’s thoughts and feelings need to be tightly controlled during this month.

As far as the social dimension is concerned, fasting is a way of experiencing hunger and developing sympathy for the less fortunate and thus learning thankfulness and appreciation for all of God’s bounties. Fasting increases people’s sympathy and compassion for those who have been deprived of their daily means of survival. Although everybody knows, in an abstract sense, that there are people who suffer from hunger and poverty around the world, this knowledge may not be great enough to have an impact on our daily behavior. During the fast of Ramadan, this knowledge is internalized, because we now not only know that there are hungry people, but we have a glimpse into their experience of hunger. This deeper, internalized knowledge helps us minimize wastefulness and to sincerely do our best to help those in need.

Ramadan is also a time of generosity. People are more generous, more cordial, and more ready than at other times of the year to do good and charitable work. Muslims often invite one another, friends and guests, Muslims and non-Muslims, in particular neighbors, regardless of creed, to share the evening meal and exchange gifts and best wishes.

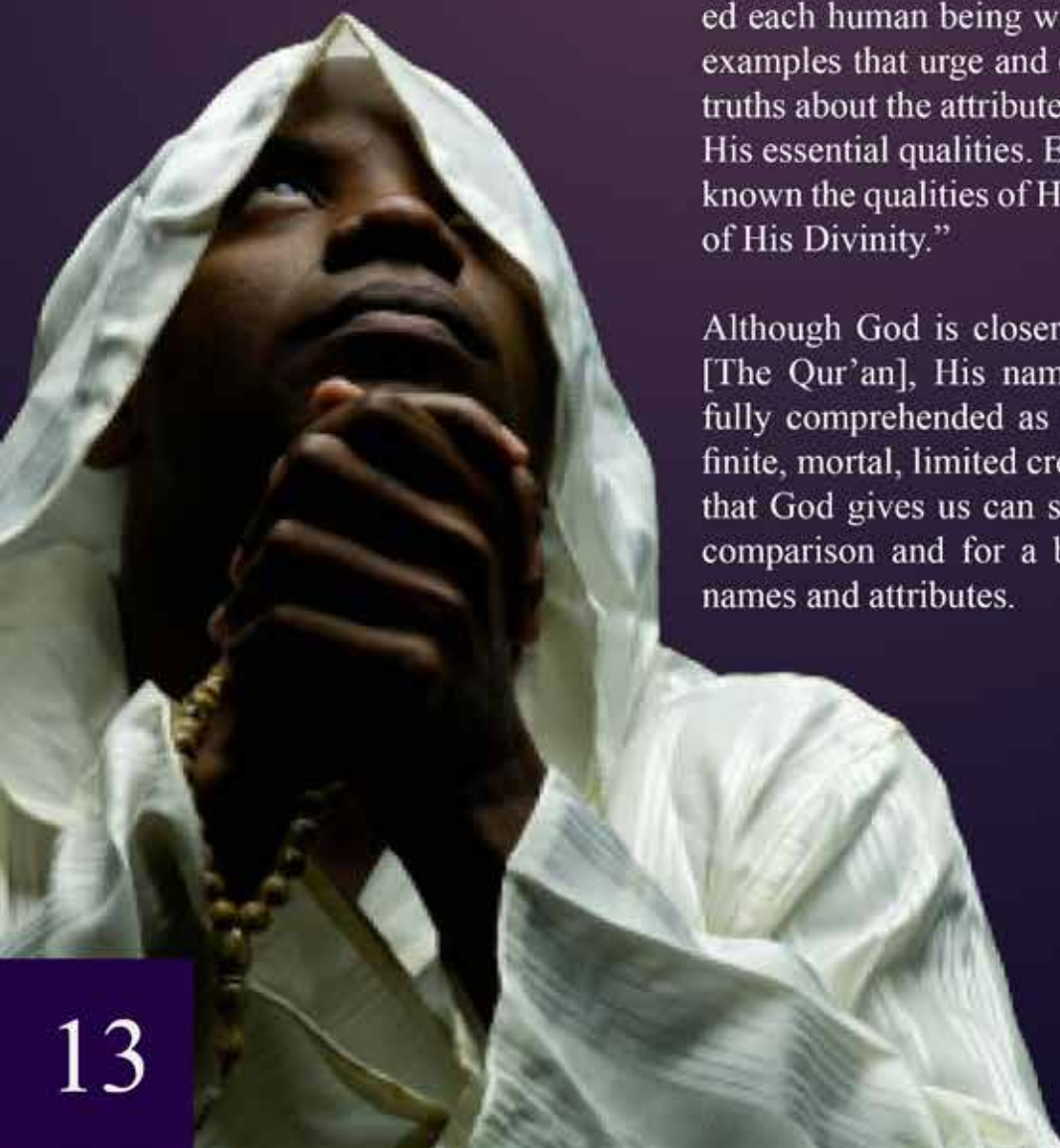
Fasting establishes a continuity of practice with religions such as Judaism and Christianity, in which fasting is recognized as an important element of devotion to God. The very verse in the Qur’an that commands Muslims to fast reminds them of this connection: “O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed on you just as it was prescribed on the people before you.”


The spiritual dimension

In the spiritual dimension, fasting during Ramadan is an act of obedience. It leads to sincere thankfulness, which is the heart of worship. It also empowers our spiritual side over our physical tendencies. If we imagine our body as a vessel, such as a ship, our mind, heart and carnal desires are like hands that are trying to control this vessel. Fasting weakens the effect of the carnal self and strengthens the effects of the mind and the heart on the control of the body.

The experience of hunger in fasting breaks the illusory lordship of the carnal self, or ego, and, reminding the carnal self of its innate helplessness, convinces it that it is only a servant. Self consciousness, or the notion of “I,” is part of the “trust” that has been given to humans as the vicegerents of God on earth [The Qur’an, Ahzab 33:72]. “The All-Wise Creator entrusted each human being with an ego that has clues and examples that urge and enable them to recognize the truths about the attributes of the Lord of Creation and His essential qualities. Ego is the measure that makes known the qualities of His Lordship and the functions of His Divinity.”

Although God is closer to us than our jugular vein [The Qur’an], His names and attributes cannot be fully comprehended as they are infinite and we are finite, mortal, limited creatures. The virtual attributes that God gives us can serve as units of measure for comparison and for a better appreciation of God’s names and attributes.





Significance of the All Inclusive concept of **JIHAD**

The Arabic term jihad, usually translated into European languages as holy war, more on the basis of its juridical usage in Islam rather than on its much more universal meaning in the Quran and Hadith, is derived from the root /jhd/ whose primary meaning is to strive or to exert oneself.

Its translation into holy war combined with the erroneous notion of Islam prevalent in the West as the 'religion of the sword' has helped to eclipse its inner and spiritual significance and to distort its connotation.

Nor has the appearance upon the stage of history during the past century and especially during the past few years of an array of movements within the Islamic world often contending or even imposing each other and using the word jihad or one of its derivative forms helped to make known the full import of its traditional meaning which alone is of concern to us here.

Instead recent distortions and even total reversal of the meaning of jihad as understood over the ages by Muslims have made it more difficult than ever before to gain insight into this key religious and spiritual concept.

To understand the spiritual significance of jihad and its wide application to nearly every aspect of human life as understood by Islam, it is necessary to remember that Islam bases itself upon the idea of establishing equilibrium within the being of man as well as in the human society where he functions and fulfills the goals of his earthly life.

This equilibrium, which is the terrestrial reflection of Divine Justice and the necessary condition for peace in the human domain, is the basis upon which the soul takes its flight towards that peace which, to use Christian terms, 'passeth understanding'.

If Christian morality sees the aim of the spiritual life and its own morality as based on the vertical flight towards that perfection and ideal which is embodied in Christ, Islam sees it in the establishment of an equilibrium both outward and inward as the necessary basis for the vertical ascent.

The very stability of Islamic society over the centuries, the immutability of Islamic norms embodied in the Shari'ah, and the timeless character of traditional Islamic civilization which is the consequence of its permanent and immutable prototype are all reflections of both the ideal of equilibrium and its realization as is so evident in the teachings of the Shari'ah (or Divine Law) as well as works of Islamic art, that equilibrium which is inseparable from the very name of Islam as being related to salam or peace.

The preservation of equilibrium in this world, however, does not mean simply a static or inactive passivity since life by nature implies movement. In the face of the contingencies of the world of change, of the withering effects of time, of the vicissitudes of terrestrial existence, to remain in equilibrium requires continuous exertion.

It means carrying out jihad at every stage of life. Human nature being what it is, given to forgetfulness and the conquest of our immortal soul by the carnal soul or passions, the very process of life of both the individual and the human collectivity implies the ever-present danger of the loss of equilibrium and the fact of falling into the state of disequilibrium which if allowed to continue cannot but lead to disintegration on the individual level and chaos on the scale of community life.

To avoid this tragic end and to fulfill the entelechy of the human state which is the realization of unity (al-tawhid) or total integration, Muslims as both individuals and members of Islamic society must carry out jihad, that is they must exert themselves at all moments of life to fight a battle both inward and outward against those forces that if not combated will destroy that equilibrium which is the necessary condition for the spiritual life of the person and the functioning of human society.

This fact is especially true if society is seen as a collectivity which bears the imprint of the Divine Norm rather than an antheap of contending and opposing units and forces.

Man is at once a spiritual and corporeal being, a micro-cosmos complete unto himself; yet he is the member of a society within which alone are certain aspects of his being developed and certain of his needs fulfilled. He possesses at once an intelligence whose substance is ultimately of a divine character and sentiments which can either veil his intelligence or abet his quest for his own Origin. In him are found both love and hatred, generosity and covetousness, compassion and aggression. Moreover, there have existed until now not just one but several 'humanities' with their own religious and moral norms and national, ethnic and racial groups with their own bonds of affiliation.


As a result the practice of jihad as applied to the world of multiplicity and the vicissitudes of human existence in the external world has come to develop numerous ramifications in the fields of political and economic activity and in social life and come to partake on the external level of the complexity which characterizes the human world.

In its most outward sense jihad came to mean the defence of dar al-islam, that is, the Islamic world, from invasion and intrusion by non-Islamic forces. The earliest wars of Islamic history which threatened the very existence of the young community came to be known as jihad par excellence in this outward sense of 'holy war'.

But it was upon returning from one of these early wars, which was of paramount importance in the survival of the newly established religious community and therefore of cosmic significance, that the Prophet nevertheless said to his companions that they had returned from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war, the greater jihad being the inner battle against all the forces which would prevent man from living according to the theomorphic norm which is his primordial and God given nature.

Throughout Islamic history, the lesser holy war has echoed in the Islamic world when parts or the whole of that world have been threatened by forces from without or within. This call has been especially persistent since the nineteenth century with the advent of colonialism and the threat to the very existence of the Islamic world.

It must be remembered, however, that even in such cases when the idea of jihad has been evoked in certain parts of the Islamic world, it has not usually been a question of religion simply sanctioning war but of the attempt of a society in which religion remains of central concern to protect itself from being conquered either by military and economic forces or by ideas of an alien nature.



This does not mean, however, that in some cases especially in recent times, religious sentiments have not been used or misused to intensify or legitimize a conflict. But to say the least, the Islamic world does not have a monopoly on this abuse as the history of other civilizations including even the secularized West demonstrates so amply.

Moreover, human nature being what it is, once religion ceases to be of central significance to a particular human collectivity, then men fight and kill each other for much less exalted issues than their heavenly faith.

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Moreover, human nature being what it is, once religion ceases to be of central significance to a particular human collectivity, then men fight and kill each other for much less exalted issues than their heavenly faith.

It means the reassertion of justice in the external environment of human existence starting with man himself. To defend one's rights and reputation, to defend the honour of oneself and one's family is itself a jihad and a religious duty. So is the strengthening of all those social bonds from the family to the whole of the Muslim people (al-ummah) which the Shari'ah emphasizes.

To seek social justice in accordance with the tenets of the Quran and of course not in the modern secularist sense is a way of re-establishing equilibrium in human society, that is, of performing jihad, as are constructive economic enterprises provided the well-being of the whole person is kept in mind and material welfare does not become an end in itself; provided one does not lose sight of the Qur'anic verse:

'The other world is better for you than this one'. (93:4)

To forget the proper relation between the two worlds would itself be instrumental in bringing about disequilibrium and would be a kind of jihad in reverse.

All of those external forms of jihad would remain incomplete and in fact contribute to an excessive externalization of human being, if they were not complemented by the greater or inner jihad which man must carry out continuously within himself for the nobility of the human state resides in the constant tension between what we appear to be and what we really are and the need to transcend ourselves throughout this journey of earthly life in order to become what we 'are'.

From the spiritual point of view all the 'pillars' of Islam can be seen as being related to jihad. The fundamental witnesses, 'There is no divinity but Allah' and 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', through the utterance of which a person becomes a Muslim are not only statements about the Truth as seen in the Islamic perspective but also weapons for the practice of inner jihad.

The very form of the first witness (La ilaha illa' Lla-h in Arabic) when written in Arabic calligraphy is like a bent sword with which all otherness is removed from the Supreme Reality while all that is positive in manifestation is returned to that Reality. The second witness is the blinding assertion of the powerful and majestic descent of all that constitutes in a positive manner the cosmos, man and revelation from that Supreme Reality.

To invoke the two witnesses in the form of the sacred language in which they were revealed is to practice the inner jihad and to bring about awareness of who we are, from whence we come and where is our ultimate abode.



The daily prayers (salat or namaz) which constitute the heart of the Islamic rites are again a never ending jihad which punctuate human existence in a continuous rhythm in conformity with the rhythm of the cosmos. To perform the prayers with regularity and concentration requires the constant exertion of our will and an unending battle and striving against forgetfulness, dissipation and laziness. It is itself a form of spiritual warfare.

Likewise, the fast of Ramadan in which one wears the armour of inner purity and detachment against the passions and temptations of the outside world requires an asceticism and inner discipline which cannot come about except through an inner holy war. Nor is the hajj to the centre of the Islamic world in Mecca possible without long preparation, effort, often suffering and endurance of hardship. It requires great effort and exertion so that the Prophet could say, "The hajj is the most excellent of all jihads".

Like the knight in quest of the Holy Grail, the pilgrim to the house of the Beloved must engage in a spiritual warfare whose end makes all sacrifice and all hardship pale into significance, for the hajj to the House of God implies for the person who practices the inner jihad encounter with the Master of the House who also resides at the centre of that other Ka'bah which is the heart.

Finally the giving of zakat or religious tax and khums is again a form of jihad not only in that in departing from one's wealth man must fight against the covetousness and greed of his carnal soul, but also in that through the payment of zakat and khums in its many forms man contributes to the establishment of economic justice in human society.

Although jihad is not one of the 'pillars of Islam', it in a sense resides within all the other 'pillars'. From the spiritual point of view in fact all of the 'pillars' can be seen in the light of an inner jihad which is essential to the life of man from the Islamic point of view and which does not oppose but complements contemplativity and the peace which result from the contemplation of the One.

The great stations of perfection in the spiritual life can also be seen in the light of the inner jihad. To become detached from the impurities of the world in order to repose in the purity of the Divine Presence requires an intense jihad for our soul has its roots sunk deeply into the transient world which the soul of fallen man mistakes for reality.

To overcome the lethargy, passivity and indifference of the soul, qualities which have become second nature to man as a result of his forgetting who he is constitutes likewise a constant jihad. To pull the reigns of the soul from dissipating itself outwardly as a result of its centrifugal tendencies and to bring it back to the centre wherein resides Divine Peace and all the beauty which the soul seeks in vain in the domain of multiplicity is again an inner jihad.

To melt the hardened heart into a flowing stream of love which would embrace the whole of creation in virtue of the love for God is to perform the alchemical process of solve et coagula inwardly through a 'work' which is none other than an inner struggle and battle against what the soul has become in order to transform it into that which it 'is' and has never ceased to be if only it were to become aware of its own nature.

Finally, to realize that only the Absolute is absolute and that only the Self can ultimately utter 'I' is to perform the supreme jihad of awakening the soul from the dream of forgetfulness and enabling it to gain the supreme principal knowledge for the sake of which it was created.





The inner jihad or warfare seen spiritually and esoterically can be considered therefore as the key for the understanding of the whole spiritual process, and the path for the realization of the One which lies at the heart of the Islamic message seen in its totality.

The Islamic path towards perfection can be conceived in the light of the symbolism of the greater jihad to which the Prophet of Islam, who founded this path on earth, himself referred.

In the same way that with every breath the principle of life which functions in us irrespective of our will and as long as it is willed by Him who created us, exerts itself through jihad to instill life within our whole body, at every moment in our conscious life we should seek to perform jihad in not only establishing equilibrium in the world about us but also in awakening to that Divine Reality which is the very source of our consciousness.

For the spiritual man, every breath is a reminder that he should continue the inner jihad until he awakens from all dreaming and until the very rhythm of his heart echoes that primordial sacred Name by which all things were made and through which all things return to their Origin. The Prophet said, 'Man is asleep and when he dies he awakens'.

Through inner jihad the spiritual man dies in this life in order to cease all dreaming, in order to awaken to that Reality which is the origin of all realities, in order to behold that Beauty of which all earthly beauty is but a pale reflection, in order to attain that Peace which all men seek but which can in fact be found only through the inner jihad.

Reasons

Why Muslims Should Fast in

Ramadan

O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint. [Quran 2:183]

Ramadan is a month of fasting and prayers for the Muslims. The fast consists of total abstinence from food and drink from dawn to dusk. There is, however, a greater significance to fasts than mere abstinence from eating and drinking. The real objective of fasts is to inculcate in man the spirit of abstinence from sins and of cultivation of virtue. Thus the Qur'an declares that the fasts have been prescribed with a view to developing piety in man, as is clear from the verse quoted at the top of this page.

How are the many facets of piety sought to be cultivated through the fasts?

1. The prime consideration in undertaking fast, as in any act of devotion, is to seek NEARNESS TO GOD and beseech HIS PLEASURE and FORGIVENESS. This itself generates a spirit of piety in man.

2. The willful creation of the stringent conditions of hunger and thirst for one's own self, simply in obedience to the Divine Order, measures the FAITH of man in God and helps to strengthen it by putting it to a severe test.

3. Fasting enhances through creation of artificial non-availability, the value of the bounties of God, which man is apt to take for granted in the midst of plentiful availability, and thus inculcates in man a spirit of GRATITUDE and consequent DEVOTION to GOD.

Nothing else can bring home to man the worth of God's bounties than a glass of water and a square meal after a day-long fast. This also reminds man that the real joy in enjoying God's bounties lies in MODERATION and RESTRAINT and not in OVER INDULGENCE.

4. Fasting makes us deeply conscious of the pangs of hunger and discomfort suffered by the less fortunate among our brethren, who may have to put up with such stringent conditions all through their lives it thus enkindles in man a spirit of SACRIFICE leading to CHARITY towards his suffering brethren.

5. Fasting affords man an unfailing training in ENDURANCE i.e. a SPIRIT OF ACCEPT

ANCE of the inevitable, which could well prepare him to put up with the unchangeable situations in life in the same spirit of RESIGNATION as cultivated during the fasts.

6. Fasting develops COURAGE, FORTITUDE and a FIGHTING SPIRIT IN man to surmount the heavy odds in life with a cool and tranquil mind. It sharpens his power of CONCENTRATION to overcome obstacles, through a vigorous exercise all through the month, leading to a steeling of his WILL POWER and RESOLVE, which could help him in trying situations in actual life. It is seen that many an undesirable habit which is found hard to leave, is more easily left off during the days of fasting.

7. Fasting teaches man RELIANCE on God and CONFIDENCE in HIM in facing the bitter situations in life with the comforting thought that these too, ordained by Him, could well be surmounted through His assistance alone, even as the rigorous state of fasting for a complete month. For, fasting develops the quality of PATIENCE in man, with the realization that, as the days of fasting, though seeming unending do have a successful and, so are all the bitter situations in life. It therefore infuses a spirit of GOOD CHEER, (driving away BITTERNESS and DESPAIR) in his attitude towards life and in his demeanor towards others.

8. Through quick alternation of the state of plenty and of scarcity, fasting seeks to inculcate in man the right type of attitude in different situations in life of GRATITUDE and THANKSGIVING in plenty and of PATIENCE and FORBEARANCE in difficulty.

9. Fasting is meant to CONQUER ANGER, not to augment it, and to develop SELF CONTROL in man; for the vigorous effort of willfully putting up with a continued state of hunger and thirst can well be extended to conquer other infirmities of human character that lead man into error and sin.

10. Fasting inculcates a spirit of TOLERANCE in man to face unpleasant conditions and situations without making his fellow-being the victim of his wrath on account of his adverse conditions, such as deprivation of his basic needs of life, which constitutes the common cause of dissension among men.

11. Fasting MELLOWS a man and enhances his character, giving jolt to the human instincts of 'PRIDE, HAUGHTINESS, ENVY and AMBITION, for when fasting, a man's energies are too sapped to follow these instincts which are the chief causes of discord and conflict among men.

12. Fasting exposes the weakness of man in the event of his being deprived of but two of the bounties of God those of food and drink; it thus infuses in him a spirit of MEEKNESS and SUBMISSION, generating HUMILITY and PRAYER in an otherwise arrogant man.

13. Fasting breathes the spirit of FORGIVENESS in man towards his subordinates, as he himself seeks God's FORGIVENESS through fasts and prayers.

14. Fasting affords lessons in PUNCTUALITY through man's strict adherence to various time schedules in the observance of fasts and offering of prayers.

15. Fasting can be made to effect ECONOMY in an individual's life, which can be extended to wider spheres.

16. Fasting enforces in man rigid DISCIPLINE mental, spiritual and physical a trait of character which forms an essential ingredient to success in human life.

17. Fasting provides LEISURE, that could he gainfully employed in devotional or intellectual pursuits. The month long duration of fasts creates a proper climate for the SPIRITUAL REFORMATION in man, infusing in him a spirit of enthusiasm and zest to turn over a new leaf an opportunity provided every year.

18. On the physical side, fasting cleanses the human system of the accumulated impurities of uninterrupted eating throughout the year. It prepares the body for toughness and hardihood to face disease or conditions of scarcity. The rigid abstinence that the fast provides, regulates man's HEALTH, sharpens his INTELLECT, gives spurt to his SPIRITUALLY and enhances the qualities of his HEART. With the cleansing of the human body, it paves the way for its easy and effective rebuilding through meals at the end of the day or after the month is over.

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