

Ramadan's Four Elements

Like other Islamic injunctions, the benefits of [Ramadan](#) are not limited to either "spiritual" or "temporal" elements of life.

In Islam, the spiritual, social, economic, political, and psychological intermingle in a consistent and cohesive whole.

For convenience of presentation, the significance of fasting is discussed under four subheadings: spiritual and moral, psychological, social, and physical and medical.

Spiritual and Moral Elements

1- Above all, fasting is an act of obedience and submission to God. Submission and commitment is based upon love for God and earnest effort to gain His pleasure and avoid His displeasure. If this is the only reason for fasting, it surely suffices.

2- Fasting is an act acknowledging God as the Only Master and Sustainer of the universe. It is only through His bounties that we have our existence and sustenance.

3- Fasting is an act of atonement for our errors and mistakes, as the Prophet Muhammad said:

Whoever fasts (the month of) Ramadan on the basis of faith and seeking (the pleasure of Allah), his past errors are forgiven." (Ahmad)

4- Fasting trains the believer to act piously and fear God. If one volunteers to refrain from lawful food and sex, he or she will be in a better position to avoid unlawful things and acts.

5- Fasting trains the believer in sincerity. Unlike other acts of worship, it is entirely based on self-restraint. Others can never know for sure if the person is fasting or if he broke the fast in secret. Self-restraint requires a high degree of sincerity and faithfulness.

6- Fasting teaches other virtues. Fasting does not exclusively mean refraining from food and drink. Essentially it means refraining from all vice and evils. The Prophet Muhammad said: "If one does not abandon falsehood in words and deeds, Allah has no need for his abandoning his food and drink." ([Bukhari](#))

7- The spirit of Ramadan with its nightly voluntary prayer (called Qiyam or [Tarawih Prayer](#)) and frequent recitations and study of the Quran provides a chance for spiritual revival (a kind of annual spiritual overhaul).

8- Fasting is a form of jihad (striving for God). It teaches self-discipline and enhances one's ability to master his needs and desires rather than be enslaved by them.

Psychological Elements

1- It enhances the feelings of inner peace, contentment and optimism. These feelings result from the realization of God's pleasure.

2- It teaches patience and perseverance and enhances the feeling of moral accomplishment.

3- Voluntary abstinence of lawful appetites leads one to appreciate the bounties of God which are usually taken for granted.

4- For a whole month every year, Muslims go through a different and exciting experience that breaks the normal routine of life. Not only can this be refreshing, it also teaches the person to adapt to varying conditions and circumstances in his life.

Social Elements

1- Fasting promotes the spirit of unity and belonging within the greater Muslim community. Millions of Muslims all over the world fast during the same month; following the same rules and observances.

2- Fasting promotes the spirit of human equality before God. Muslims: Males and females, rich and poor from all ethnic backgrounds go through the same experience of deprivation with no special privileges for any group or class.

3- Fasting promotes the spirit of charity and sympathy toward the poor and needy. A rich person may be able to "imagine" the suffering of the poor or "think" about hunger. Yet, one can not fully appreciate suffering or hunger until one actually "experiences" or "feels" them. This may explain, in part, why Ramadan is also known as the month of charity and generosity.

4- Fasting promotes Islamic sociability. Muslims are urged to invite others to break the fast with them at sunset and to gather for Quranic study, prayer and visits. This provides a better chance for socialization in a brotherly and spiritual atmosphere.

The Prophet Muhammad indicated on more than one occasion that inviting a fasting person to break his fast (after sunset) is an act which is highly rewarded by God.

Physical and Medical Elements

A great deal has been written about the medical and health benefits of fasting; both by Muslim and non-Muslim scientists. These benefits include the elimination of harmful fatty substances from the blood stream, helping the cure of certain types of intestinal and stomach ailments and the renewal of body tissues.

Needless to say that some ailments may be aggravated by fasting in which case the person is exempted from fasting. For those who may be engaged in Islamically (and medically) undesirable habits such as over-eating or [smoking](#), the self-control and discipline exercised in Ramadan provide an excellent way to "kick" these bad habits. In a sense, fasting is an annual physical overhaul of the body.

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