

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

"A great month, a blessed month, a month containing a night which is better than a thousand months has approached you people. Allah has appointed the observance of fasting during it as an obligatory duty, and the passing of its night in prayer as a voluntary practice."

"It is the month of endurance and the reward of endurance is Paradise. It is the month of sharing with others, and a month in which the believer's provision is increased."

"It is a month whose beginning is mercy, whose middle is forgiveness, and whose end is freedom from Hell."
(Mishkat).

Ramadan

Importance of Ramadan, welcoming the month of Ramadan, what to do and what to pray in Ramadan

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Ramadan: The Month of Virtues and Blessings

1. Introduction – The Importance of Ramadan

The month of Ramadan is a blessed month and an opportunity for you to draw near to Allah, increase your spirituality, and gain abundant reward. The Prophet (peace and blessings upon him (PBUH)) stated that Ramadan is a month in which “the believers’ provision is increased.” “The month of Ramadan is the month of great gains and profits. The smart trader is the one who makes the most of special occasions to increase his profits. So make the most of this month by doing lots of acts of worship, praying a great deal, reading the Qur’an, forgiving people, being kind to others, and giving charity to the poor.” (Sheikh M. S. Al-Munajjid, a prominent Saudi Muslim lecturer and author¹).

The Prophet (peace and blessings upon him (PBUH)) stated with regards to Ramadan: “He who is deprived of its good has indeed suffered deprivation.” (Mishkat).

This month is important for the following reasons:

- a) It was the month in which the Holy Quran was revealed. The Holy Quran states: “**The month of Ramadan is that in which was revealed the Qur'an, wherein is guidance for mankind and the clear signs of guidance and distinction.** (2:185).

Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, member of the North American Fiqh Council states²: “Ramadan is a great month. Allah chose this month and a particular night in this month to grace humanity with His Final Testament, His Last Message, the Qur’an. The moment of this revelation became a sacred moment, and that time and month became an eternal time for us. Allah chose this time, and He has filled it with His countless blessings. In this month we have a greater urge and desire to do good deeds. This month becomes the month of virtues and blessings for us.”

In addition to the revelation of the Quran, Ramadan is also the month in which the other scriptures were revealed to Prophets Esa (Injeel/Bible), Dawood (Zaboor), Moosa (Tawrah/Old Testament), Ebrahim (Shifas), peace and blessings upon them all.

- b) Ramadan is the month that contains the best night of the year, which is Laylat Al-Qadr (the night of power). The Quran states: “**We sent it (the Qur'an) down on a blessed night...**” [i.e. the Night of Al-Qadr]. (44: 3-5). Scholars are of the opinion that the night of Laylat-Al-Qadr was when the Holy Quran was revealed from *Lowhul Mahoos* (sacred tablets) to the First Heaven. The Quran states: “**Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Power.**” (97:1)

The night of power is the most important night in the Islamic calendar. It is better than a thousand months. The Quran states: “**And what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? The night of Power is better than a thousand Months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission, on every errand: Peace!.....This until the rise of Morn!**” (97: 2-5).

This is the night of contact between the Creator and His creation. The Quran states that the angels descend to hear the duas/suplications of those in prayer. In addition scholars are of the opinion that the spirit referred to by the Quran is Angel Gabriel and he also descends to hear us in prayer on this night.

- c) We have been instructed by the Almighty to fast in the month of Ramadan so that we can attain piety. "Thus whosoever among you witness the month (Ramadan) must fast...." (al-Baqarah: 184). "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who were before you, in order that you may learn *taqwa* (piety)."

Dr. Muhammad M. Abu Laylah, Professor of the Islamic Studies & Comparative Religions at Al-Azhar University, states³:

"Fasting in Ramadan is the best means to purify our souls and to set our thinking right. It strengthens not only our bodies but also our spirits. The purpose of fasting as Allah says in the Qur'an is to establish *taqwa* firmly in the heart.

"To have *taqwa* in the heart means to be strong in body and spirit and to be able to resist the temptation of evil and human desires and lust. Thus the impious person has no resistance or power to protect himself. That is why he can easily be overcome by evil and can easily follow his whims and personal longings, which can lead him to destruction and agony. *Taqwa*, which as we said is the purpose and the fruit of fasting, is wide in its sense. It embraces everything that can harm or benefit man."

Dalia Salaheldin, an author, states⁴: "A major goal of fasting the month of Ramadan is to realise and achieve a pious heart. Fasting produces piety. That is to say true and sincere fasting, within which one watches his/her glimpses and whims, and deeds of the heart, not only physical desires and acts. Abstaining lawful food, drink and sex is not the target of fasting. They are but the means by which one realise patience. And, patience is an act of the heart, not of the body. It is a fundamental chord of a pious heart."

- d) Ramadan is the month in which the devils are chained up and the gates to paradise are open. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "When the first night of Ramadan comes, the devils and rebellious jinns are put in chains and the doors of hell are closed, none of them remains open. The doors of heaven are open and none of them remains closed. And a caller calls, 'O seeker of goodness, come forward, and O seeker of evil, desist. And Allah has many (in this month) who will be freed from Hell.' This announcement is made every night." Reported by al-Tirmidhi, Hadith no. 618).

The Almighty has opened the gates of paradise and chained the devils – its now up to us to perform the required deeds to enter through these gates. However, whilst the devils are chained, we are still weak within ourselves and hence continue to sin. We need to ensure that our conduct during this month (and always) is the best.

2. How to welcome Ramadan

Dr Kutty, a senior lecturer at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, states⁵: "You should welcome the month of Ramadan with great fervour and spirit and expect to come out of it fully transformed in body, mind, and soul."

You should also take stock, repent and seek forgiveness. This is a good time to have a look at yourself. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁶, "The smart man is the one who takes stock of himself and strives to do that which will benefit him after death, and the helpless one is the one who follows his own whims and desires and engages in wishful thinking, (assuming that Allah will forgive him regardless of what he does and that he does not need to strive to good deeds)."

We need to focus on our faith (iman) and cut out gossiping, backbiting and hypocrisy. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever does not give up false statements (i.e. telling lies), and evil deeds, and speaking bad words to others, Allah is not in need of his (fasting) leaving his food and drink." (Bukhari, volume 8, Hadith number 83). The Quran states: "**Every soul shall have a taste of death and on the Day of Judgement shall you be paid your full recompense; only the one who is saved from the Fire and admitted to the Garden would have succeeded; for the life of this world is but of goods and chattels of deception.**"(3: 185).

Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, former President of the Islamic Society of North America states⁷: "Almighty Allah is giving us another opportunity in our life to witness the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is a great time of Allah's blessings and His mercy. Every Muslim should take full advantage of this time. We should get ready to welcome this month and receive it with happiness. The following are some ways to welcome this month:

- a) Special *du`aa'*: Pray to Allah that this month reaches you while you are in the best of health and safety so that you can fast and do all your acts of devotion (*`ibadat*) with ease and enthusiasm.
- b) Thanks and happiness: When the month comes, then you should be thankful to Allah and show happiness. The Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) used to greet each other [with joy] on the beginning of Ramadan.
- c) Planning and determination: You should make a good plan for the whole month about how you are going to organise your days and evenings during Ramadan. Plan special schedules for your work so that you can pray on time, read the Qur'an, and take *sahur* and *iftar* on time. Have sincere intention and determination to take full advantage of this time. Also have a full determination and commitment that you will not do any sin or anything wrong during this time.
- d) Learn about the rules of fasting: Fiqh of fasting is very important so that you do not do anything that will spoil your fasts."

3. Use this month to renew/reinforce your faith

Ramadan is a month in which we need to rejuvenate our faith. Dr. Ahmad Kutty, a senior lecturer at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, states⁸:

"Ramadan is the most blessed month in the Islamic calendar. It is primarily a spiritual training course intended to help us cultivate essential virtues and skills in order to lead a meaningful life. Most often we live at a very superficial level of our existence, forgetting our true essence and identity as human beings. In other words, we become totally preoccupied with the physical and material dimensions, forgetting the spiritual core of our personalities. Ramadan, therefore, comes to remind us of who we truly are and how we can discipline ourselves in such a way that we are fully awake to our full spiritual potential."

4. Key Hadith explaining Ramadan and what to do in Ramadan

The Prophet (PBUH) provided the following guidance for the month of Ramadan:

Narrated Salman al-Farisi: Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said in a sermon which he delivered to them on the last day of Sha'ban:

- "A great month, a blessed month, a month containing a night which is better than a thousand months has approached you people.
- Allah has appointed the observance of fasting during it as an obligatory duty, and the passing of its night in prayer as a voluntary practice.

- If someone draws near to Allah during it with some good act he will be like one who fulfills an obligatory duty in another month, and he who fulfills an obligatory duty in it will be like one who fulfills seventy obligatory duties in another month.
- It is the month of endurance and the reward of endurance is Paradise.
- It is the month of sharing with others, and a month in which the believer's provision is increased. If someone gives one who has been fasting something with which to break his fast it will provide forgiveness of his sins and save him from Hell, and he will have a reward equal to his without his reward being diminished in any respect."
- The Prophet (PBUH) continued: "It is a month whose beginning is mercy, whose middle is forgiveness, and whose end is freedom from Hell." (Mishkat).

This hadith is explained below:

RAMADAN: THE MONTH CONTAINING A NIGHT WHICH IS BETTER THAN A THOUSAND MONTHS

The night referred to is Laylat al-Qadr.

Laylat Al-Qadr is discussed in more detail in a separate publication.

RAMADAN: THE MONTH IN WHICH THE NIGHT SHOULD BE PASSED IN PRAYER VOLUNTARILY

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle (PBUH) said, "Whoever establishes prayers during the nights of Ramadan faithfully out of sincere faith and hoping to attain Allah's rewards, all his past sins will be forgiven." (Bukhari, volume 1, Hadith number 36).

Scholars interpret "passing the night in prayer" as referring to performing Tarawih and Tahajjud prayers. Both these prayers are explained below:

Tarawih Prayer

Ælfwine Mischler, an author on Islamic issues states⁹:

"Tarawih Prayer is a special prayer Muslims perform only in the month of Ramadan. It is a sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), which means that it was his practice to perform Tarawih and Muslims are encouraged to do likewise, but it is not obligatory.

"Tarawih is performed after `Isha' (Night) Prayer. It can be performed at home, alone or in congregation, or at a mosque. In many mosques, one *juz'* (30th part) of the Qur'an is recited each night in Tarawih. Thus performing Tarawih in the mosque imparts a special flavour to Ramadan, especially if one is able to do so every night and hear the whole Qur'an recited during the month.

"Tarawih consists of an even number of *rak`ahs*, performed two by two (as Fajr Prayer is performed). It is recommended to take a short break after every four *rak`ahs*. In a mosque, there may be a short religious talk or *du`aa'* (supplication) or *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) at this time."

The number of *rak`ahs* is not fixed. Dr. Ahmad Kutty, a senior lecturer at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada states: "As far as *Tarawih* is concerned, it is a recommended prayer and there is no fixed number for it. Traditionally, Muslims have prayed 8 *rak`ahs* or 20, or 30, or 40 *rak`ahs* in various circumstances. So, as Imam Ibn Taymiyyah said, it is up to the decision of the Imam and the worshippers; if they can perform 8 *rak`ahs* while reading the same portion of the Qur'an that one would read while praying 20

rak`ahs, they may do so. However, if the Imam feels that the congregation cannot endure long recitation with fewer number of *rak`ahs*, he can increase the number of *rak`ahs* and reduce the portion of recitation in each *rak`ah*."

Tahajjud Prayer

The Late Al-Azhar scholar Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq states in his book¹⁰: *Fiqh As-Sunnah*:

"Allah Almighty says: "And some part of the night awake for prayer, a largess for thee. It may be that thy Lord will raise thee to a praised position." (Al-Isra': 79)

"In praising those who perform the late night prayers, Allah says: "The slaves of the Beneficent are they who walk upon the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant address them, they say: 'Peace' and they who spend the night prostrating before their Lord and standing." (Al-Furqan: 63-64)

"Salman al-Farsi quoted the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as saying: "Observe the night prayer, it was the practice of the righteous before you and it brings you closer to your Lord and it is penance for evil deeds and erases the sins and repels disease from the body."

Etiquettes of Tahajjud prayer

"The following acts are recommended for one who wishes to perform the *Tahajjud* prayers:

1. Upon going to sleep, one should make the intention to perform the *Tahajjud* prayers.
2. On waking up, one should wipe one's face, use a tooth brush, and look to the sky and make the supplication which has been reported from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): "O Allah! There is no god but Thee, Glory be to Thee, I seek Thy forgiveness for my sins, and I ask for Your mercy. O Allah, increase my knowledge and let my heart not swerve after You have guided me, and bestow mercy upon me from Thyself. All praise be to Allah who has given us back life after our death and unto Him is the resurrection."

Then, one should recite the last ten verses of *Surat Al`Imran* starting with, "Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day,- there are indeed Signs for men of understanding." Then one should say, "O Allah, to You belongs the praise. You are the Light of the heavens and the earth and what is therein. And to You belongs the praise. You are the truth and Your promise is true. Meeting with You is true; the Paradise is true, the Fire is true. The Prophets are true, and Muhammad is true and the Hour is true ! O Allah, to You have I submitted, in You have I believed, in You have I put my trust, to You have I turned, by You I argue and to You do I turn for my decisions. Forgive me of my former and latter sins, and those done in private and those done in public. You are Allah, there is no god besides Thee."

3. One should begin *Tahajjud* with two quick *rak`ahs* and then one may pray whatever one wishes after that. `A'ishah said: "When the Prophet prayed during the late-night, he would begin his prayers with two quick *rak`ahs*." Both of these reports are related by Muslim.
4. One should wake up one's family for *Tahajjud*. Abu Hurairah quoted the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), as saying: "May Allah bless the man who gets up during the night to pray and wakes up his wife and who, if she refuses to get up, sprinkles water on her

face. And may Allah bless the woman who gets up during the night to pray and wakes up her husband and who, if he refuses, sprinkles water on his face." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said: "If a man wakes his wife and prays during the night or they pray two *rak'ahs* together, they will be recorded among those (men and women) who (constantly) make remembrance of Allah." This is related by Abu Dawud and others through an authentic chain of narrators.

5. If one gets sleepy while performing *Tahajjud* one should sleep. This is due to the hadith narrated by `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) as she quoted Allah's Messenger as saying: "When one of you gets up during the night for prayer and his Qur'anic recital gets mixed up to the extent that he does not know what he says, he should lie down." This is related by Muslim.

Recommended time for *Tahajjud*

"*Tahajjud* may be performed in the early part of the night, the middle part of the night, or the latter part of the night, but after the obligatory *salatul `Isha'* (Evening prayer).

"Commenting on this subject, Ibn Hajar says: "There was no specific time in which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) would perform his late night prayer; but he used to do whatever was easiest for him."

Best time for *Tahajjud*

"It is best to delay this prayer to the last third portion of the night. Abu Hurairah quoted that the Messenger of Allah, as saying: "Our Lord descends to the lowest heaven during the last third of the night, inquiring: "Who will call on Me so that I may respond to him? Who is asking something of Me so I may give it to him? Who is asking for My forgiveness so I may forgive him?" This is related by the group.

"`Amr ibn Abasah reported that he heard the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) saying: "The closest that a slave comes to his Lord is during the middle of the latter portion of the night. If you can be among those who remember Allah, the Exalted One, at that time then do so."

The number of *rak'ahs* to be performed during *Tahajjud*

"*Tahajjud* prayer does not entail a specific number of *rak'ahs* which must be performed nor is there any maximum limit which has to be performed.

"Samurah ibn Jundub said: "The Messenger of Allah ordered us to pray during the night, a little or a lot, and to make the last of the prayer the Witr prayer." This is related by at-Tabarani and al-Bazzar. Anas quoted Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), as saying: "Prayer in my mosque is equal to ten thousand prayers [elsewhere]. And prayer in the Sacred Mosque is equivalent to one hundred thousand prayers [elsewhere]. And prayer in the battlefield is equivalent to one million prayers [elsewhere]. And what is more than all of that is two *rak'ahs* performed by a servant [of Allah] during the middle of the night." This is reported by Abu ash-Shaikh, Ibn Hibban in his work *ath-Thawab*, and al-Munzhiri, in his book *at-Tarhib watTarhib*, is silent about it."

RAMADAN: THE MONTH IN WHICH VOLUNTARY ACTS (NAWAFIL) ATTAINS THE EQUIVALENT OF AN OBLIGATORY ACT (FARD) - IN REWARD

The Prophet (PBUH) states in the Hadith: "If someone draws near to Allah during it with some good act he will be like one who fulfils an obligatory duty in another month...."

Ramadan is a month in which special countenance and blessings are showered on believers. Muslims are encouraged to perform all their Sunnah and voluntary prayers as the reward is the equivalent of a fard (obligatory) act. You should also be charitable - every cent given in voluntary charity in Ramadan will be multiplied (for reward). Charity also encompasses helping people in difficulty, being kind, offering advice, etc. Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Charity is obligatory every day on every joint of a human being. If one helps a person in matters concerning his riding animal by helping him to ride it or by lifting his luggage on to it, all this will be regarded as charity. A good word, and every step one takes to offer the compulsory congregational prayer, is regarded as charity; and guiding somebody on the road is regarded as charity." (Bukhari).

RAMADAN: THE MONTH IN WHICH ONE OBLIGATORY DUTY IS THE EQUIVALENT OF SEVENTY OBLIGATORY DUTIES IN ANOTHER MONTH

One prayer is the equivalent of seventy obligatory prayers in another month. So focus on your obligatory prayers – these are more important than the Tarawih and Tahajjud prayers.

Another obligatory duty is reading the Quran. The Quran states: "Read ye, therefore, as much of the Quran as may be easy for you....." (73:20).

Due to the close connection between Ramadan and the scriptures, scholars encourage Muslims to complete reading the Quran not just once but numerous times in Ramadan. The Angel Gabriel used to sit with the Prophet (PBUH) every day during Ramadan so that the latter could recite all that had been revealed so far of the Qur'an. In his final year, the Prophet recited the entire Qur'an twice in Ramadan. Narrated Ibn Abbas:Gabriel used to meet him (the Prophet (PBUH)) every night of Ramadan to teach him the Quran. (Bukhari, volume 1).

Muslims today continue the tradition of reading the entire Qur'an at least once during Ramadan. Ælfwine Mischler, an author and editor states¹¹: "In Muslim countries, it is not at all unusual in this month to see many people reading the Qur'an while riding the bus or metro to and from work. Others find time early in the morning, late at night, or at intervals throughout the day. Many others read or recite the Qur'an during Tarawih Prayers, which are held only during Ramadan, or in private late night Prayers called Tahajjud."

Many Muslims also pay their zakat in this month to obtain greater reward for performing an obligatory duty. However, you should not wait for Ramadan to pay your zakat unless you have chosen Ramadan as your zakat calculation month (similar to a financial/tax year end). Zakat should be paid immediately after it has been calculated.

RAMADAN: THE MONTH OF ENDURANCE

The Prophet (PBUH) stated: "It is the month of endurance and the reward of endurance is Paradise." Endurance is interpreted by some scholars to mean patience – sabir. There are three types of endurance:

- a) Endurance when fasting. If the day is long and hot a person should not complain of the conditions and hardships as this is the month of endurance. It is expected of you to experience the difficulties. If a person starts complaining that it is too hot, they are thirsty, the day is too long - the merit of the fast may be lost. The Prophet (PBUH) has said that we should bear our fasts patiently.
- b) Patience when you are about to commit a sin. A person should try and refrain from committing sin in the month of Ramadan.

c) Patience at a time of difficulty or hardship. Seek refuge in the Almighty in this holy month from all your difficulties and hardships.

RAMADAN: THE MONTH OF SHARING WITH OTHERS

The Prophet (PBUH) stated: "It is the month of sharing with others....." Ramadan is a month in which we should have sympathy with the poor, Muslim or non-Muslim. Narrated Ibn Abbas: Allah's Apostle (PBUH) was the most generous of all the people, and he used to reach the peak in generosity in the month of Ramadan. (Bukhari, volume 1, Hadith number 5).

In addition you should focus on your relations with your family, neighbours and friends. You should be generous towards them, share meals with them and assist them as much as possible. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Of the dinar you spend as a contribution in Allah's path, or to set free a slave, or as sadaqah given to the needy, or to support your family, the one yielding the greatest reward is that which you spent on your family." (Muslim).

GIVING FOOD TO A FASTING PERSON IN ORDER TO BREAK THEIR FASTS

If you give a person who has been fasting something with which to break his/her fast you will gain a reward equal to his/her without his/her reward being diminished in any respect. The provision need not be elaborate. "Allah gives this reward to him who gives one who has been fasting some milk mixed with water, or a date, or a drink of water with which to break his fast. Anyone who gives a full meal to one who has been fasting will be given a drink from my tank (Hawd) by Allah and will not thirst till he enters Paradise." (Mishkat).

Giving food to a fasting person is the ideal opportunity to do good neighbourly (in the greater context) deeds. The opportunity should also be used to give food to poor persons.

RAMADAN: A MONTH WHOSE BEGINNING IS MERCY

The Prophet (PBUH) stated that the first part (first ten days) of the month are for mercy: "It is a month whose beginning is mercy....." Therefore in the first ten days of Ramadan one should beg Allah for Mercy. Ask Allah: "O Allah, shower your mercy on my family, on our homes, on our neighbours and on the poor." Beg the Almighty for mercy and He says that if you show gratitude, He (the Almighty) will increase his favours on to you.

How does one show gratitude? Show gratitude by thanking Allah for what you have. Spend time reading dikir, begging for mercy, and seeking out the poor.

RAMADAN: A MONTH WHOSE MIDDLE IS FORGIVENESS

The Prophet (PBUH) said the second ten days of the month are for forgiveness: "It is a month whose.....middle is forgiveness....." Therefore in the second ten days, if you have hardships and/or difficulties make abundant istighfaar (repentance). The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Gabriel (A.S.) came to me and said, 'Curse to him who found the blessed month of Ramadan and let it pass by without begging forgiveness.'" (Bukhari).

The Prophet (PBUH) also said: "A person should perform four things abundantly in this month. Two of the things you will be able to please your Lord with. The remaining two things you cannot do without."

The two things in which a person can obtain the pleasure of Allah are:

- reciting the Shahada abundantly - "there is none worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammed (PBUH) is the messenger of Allah".
- reciting Istighfaar abundantly.

The two things a person cannot do without are:

- begging Allah for entry into Paradise;
- begging Allah for protection from hell.

There must be sincerity in the istighfaar/repentance. The Prophet (PBUH) has stated that whoever makes abundant genuine istighfaar - Allah will release him of his difficulties.

How to pray for forgiveness?

The Prophet (PBUH) said¹²: "*The chief of prayers for forgiveness is: O' Allah, You are my Lord, there is no God but You. You created me, and I am your servant, and I will keep my covenant and promise [of faith and sincere obedience] to You, as much as I can. I seek refuge with You from all the evil I have done, I admit, before You, your blessings upon me, and I admit to You, all my sins. So forgive me, for certainly none can forgive sins except You.*"

`Abdullah ibn `Umar said: We counted in a single sitting the Messenger of Allah, (PBUH), saying one hundred times: "**Rabbi-ghfir-lee wa tub `alayya innaka anta-t-tawwabu-l-ghafoor.**" [My Lord, forgive me and accept my repentance, verily you are Acceptor of Repentance, Oft-Forgiving.] (Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Ibn Maajah).

The Prophet (PBUH) said, "None of you should say: 'O Allah! Forgive me if You wish,' or 'Bestow Your Mercy on me if You wish,' or 'Provide me with means of subsistence if You wish,' but he should be firm in his request, for Allah does what He will and nobody can force Him (to do anything)." (Bukhari).

Dr. Ahmad Kutty, a senior lecturer at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, provides the following guidance with regards to seeking repentance for sins¹³:

Repentance:

"If you committed evil but have repented sincerely, and changed your life around for better, then Allah has certainly promised to grant you mercy and forgiveness. It is one of the basic principles of belief in Islam that Allah is All-Relenting, All-Forgiving and All-Merciful.

"Here are a few verses which clearly convey this crucial concept:

"Do they not know that it is Allah Who accepts the repentance of His servants and receives (approves) their charity, and that Allah is the Relenting, the Compassionate?" (At-Tawbah: 104)

"Say: 'O My servants who wronged against their souls, do not despair of Allah's mercy! For Allah forgives all sins; for He is indeed Forgiving, Compassionate.'" (Az-Zumar: 53)

"So do not put off repentance; take the necessary steps immediately, for no one can tell when the death will overtake us. The door of repentance is open so long as we are not in the throes of death, for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, **"Allah accepts the repentance of His servant so long as death has not reached his collar bone."** But since we have no way of knowing when death will overtake us, we must never be complacent or slack in hastening to taking steps towards repentance.

"While speaking of repentance, I must rush to add, that it cannot be considered as valid unless one takes the following steps:

Firstly, one must feel deep remorse for the sins one has committed.

Secondly, one must refrain from it totally while also abstaining from all those leads or circumstances that led him to such a sin in the first place.

Thirdly, he must be firmly resolved never to sin again, and immediately becoming occupied in whatever good deeds that he can in order to wipe out his past sins.

Fourthly, all of the above involve sins involving the rights of Allah; if, however, your sins involve the rights of human beings, then you must also do whatever it takes to return or compensate or redress the grievances of the person you have wronged. Paying him his dues or compensating him in whatever ways possible becomes an essential condition of valid repentance.

“Repentance, as stated above once accomplished, will undoubtedly wipe out one’s sins, and guarantee him a clean record. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, **“One who has repented of a sin (sincerely) is like one who has never sinned at all.”**”

RAMADAN: A MONTH WHOSE END IS FREEDOM FROM HELL

The last ten days are for freedom from hell: “It is a month whose....end is freedom from hell.” A person should beg Allah to protect them from hell. “O Allah gives us good in this world and in the hereafter.”

Freedom from hell is also the reward for complying with the requirements set by the Almighty and the Prophet (PBUH) for the month.

Narrated Abu Huraira: When the Prophet (PBUH) stated that his people would be granted forgiveness on the last night of Ramadan and was asked whether it was Laylat al-Qadr, he replied, “No, but a workman is paid his full wages only when he has finished his work.” (Mishkat).

Narrated Aisha: With the start of the last ten days of Ramadan, the Prophet (PBUH) used to tighten his waist belt (i.e. hard work) and used to pray all the night, and used to keep his family awake for the prayers. (Bukhari, volume 3, Hadith number 241).

You should focus your energies in the last ten days in extra prayer and begging the Almighty for protection from the fire of hell.

Muslims are also encouraged to spend the last ten days observing *I`tikaf* Muzammil H. Siddiqi, member of the Fiqh Council of North America states¹⁴: “*I`tikaf* in the last ten days of Ramadan in the *Masjid* (mosque) is a beautiful tradition of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). It is like a spiritual retreat. It is reported by `Aishah, may Allah be pleased with her, that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to observe *I`tikaf* during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan and he continued this practice until his death. After him, his wives carried on this practice of observing *I`tikaf* regularly. (Reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

“It is recommended that every Muslim make at least one *I`tikaf* in his/ her life. There must be at least a few people in every community who should do it in every *Masjid* every year to keep this tradition alive. Men should do *I`tikaf* in the *Masjid* so that they can pray in *Jama`ah* (congregation) and also offer the Friday prayers. Women can also do *I`tikaf*, but theirs must be at home for reasons of modesty and for their own convenience. There is a great blessing in *I`tikaf* and people who do it bring blessings upon themselves, upon their families, and upon the Muslim community at large.

“The Sunnah of *I`tikaf* is that one make the intention and begin the *I`tikaf* on the evening of the 20th of Ramadan from sunset time and continue until the sighting of the moon for `Edu-Fitr. During *I`tikaf* men should stay in the *Masjid* day and night and should not leave it except for the use of toilet or shower. They are allowed to eat also inside the *Masjid*, but if it is not convenient they may go outside and come back as

soon as they finish.”

5. Lavish Tables during Ramadan

The late Sheikh Sayyed Mutawalli Ad-Darsh, former head of the United Kingdom Shari'ah council stated¹⁵:

"The whole business of lavishing tables with delicious foods, in contrast to normal attitude during the rest of the year, is something that clearly negates the purpose of Ramadan.

"Today people have developed a strange habit of going to extremes in filling stomach with foods, as if they are saying that "Ramadan is month of food" not "month of fasting"!

"However, Ramadan is a reminder to Muslims to be caring, compassionate and kind. Rather than indulging ourselves in trivialities, we should be making an effort to save more during Ramadan and giving to the less fortunate."

¹ A piece of advice to welcome Ramadan – Islamonline – 25/10/03

² Ramadan the month of virtue and blessings – Islamonline – 23/11/02 and 27/09/05

³ Means of Enhancing Faith in the Last Days of Ramadan – Islamonline – 27 November 2002

⁴ Live Dialogue – Are you ready for Ramadan, Islamonline, 2004

⁵ Tips to benefit optimally from Ramadan – Islamonline – 26/9/05

⁶ A piece of advice to welcome Ramadan – Islamonline – 25/10/03

⁷ How to Welcome the Month of Fasting – Islamonline – 29 October 2003

⁸ Tips to benefit optimally from Ramadan – Islamonline – 26/9/05

⁹ Tarawih Prayer – Islamonline – 25/10/03

¹⁰ Tahajjud: Virtues and ways of performance – Islamonline – 11/11/03

¹¹ Introduction to Ramadan – Islamonline – 22/10/03

¹² Source: Yusuf Islam

¹³ The door of repentance is wide open – Islamonline – 4/8/03

¹⁴ *I'tikaf* in the Last Third of Ramadan – Islamonline – 12/11/03

¹⁵ Lavish tables during Ramadan – Islamonline – 28/10/03