



Reflections | Fast for the Climate

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IN THE NAME OF ALLAH MOST GRACIOUS MOST MERCIFUL

Fasting and Climate Justice: Some Muslim Reflections

By Imam Ibrahim Saïdy

Climate Change and its adverse effects are undeniable realities of our world today. It is devastating and irreversible. Life is becoming increasingly unbearable for many populations —plant, animal and human. Species, cultures, resources and many lives could be lost.

The Fast for Climate Justice Initiative of the Lutheran World Federation is a step in the right direction. This could indeed create awareness and positive action to save our Planet, our lives and the lives of future generations yet unborn.

Allah, the Exalted says in the Glorious Quran:

“O you who believe; decreed upon you is fasting as it had been decreed upon those before you that you may attain to God-consciousness.” (Sura: 2 Verse: 183)

In Hadith the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), also says:

Allah, the Exalted said, "Every action of the son of Adam belongs to him except the fast. It is Mine and I repay him for it. Fasting is a protection. When one of you has a day of fasting, he should then speak neither obscenely nor too loudly; and if someone seeks to curse him or fight with him, let him say, 'I am fasting.' By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, the smell of the mouth of the one who fasts is more delectable to Allah than the scent of musk. The one who fasts has two joys in which to delight: when he breaks his fast, he rejoices; and when he meets his Lord, he rejoices in his fast." (Muslim: 13:163)

After *Imaan*, (Faith) *Salaat* (Ritual Prayer) and *Zakaat*, (Alms) the most important pillar of Islam is *Sawm* (Fasting) during the month of Ramadhaan (the 9th month of the Islamic calendar). Optional fasting however has also been recommended and observed by the Prophet and Muslims after him throughout the rest of the year.

Sawm literally means 'to abstain'. But in the terminology of the Islamic *Sharee'ah* (Divine Law), it means 'to refrain from eating, drinking, cohabitation as well as all sensual pleasures from dawn to sunset, with the intention of worship'.

As indicated in the above quotations, there are numerous spiritual benefits associated with fasting. Fasting is extremely efficient for the acquisition of *taqwaa* (piety or God consciousness), without which a Muslim cannot gain closeness to Allah. The prime benefit in the pursuit of *taqwaa* is the suppression of the erratic desires and demands of the *nafs* (base carnal desires), which always work in collusion with Satan to spiritually and morally ruin the believer. If the *nafs* is allowed unrestricted freedom, it will succeed in making man a slave of lust, passion and base emotions. One's *Imaan* (Faith in Allah) will suffer as a result. Therefore, it is essential that the *nafs* be restrained. Fasting greatly aids towards pursuing this objective. By fasting, the Muslim learns to suppress his lowly desires. Thus the ability of inculcating *taqwaa* is created. Moreover, fasting purifies the soul, and creates gratification in worship, making the heart conducive to worship. The bond with Allah is thus strengthened.

Another outstanding feature of fasting is that it lifts man above the level of animals and beasts—that eat, drink and copulate by instinct, whenever the desire arises. It takes him to a level parallel or even higher than that of the angels. Since the latter do not eat or drink; they are devoid and free of evil inclinations and all things base. Man, by reducing

his appetite for worldly temptations and emotional desires, moves himself to the realms of the angels.

As well as the many spiritual benefits of fasting, there are social as well material benefits and advantages in fasting too. Notably, feeling for the poor, the hungry and deprived is engendered. Man becomes more aware and conscious of his less fortunate brethren and their deprivation, which in turn teaches him to sacrifice part of his wealth resources to assist others in need. Thus the feeling for humanity is generated and inculcated in man. Fasting in fact contributes to both physical and mental health as well.

When the Muslim fasts in this manner he/she will notice great changes in their life. Spiritual strength will be gained. His/her life will be genuinely Quranic and thus Islamic. Such a person is richly rewarded with closeness to his/her Lord and thus being at peace with themselves and their environment in general.

Imam Ibrahim Saidy, Islamic Council of Norway, Daru Salaam Islamic Centre – Oslo