

Before the Sand Slips Away

Hasn't there come upon man a period of time when they were nothing remembered (Al-Insaan 76/1).

Imagine that you are four years old and on the beach. The camp leader has told you that you have five minutes to build a great castle. "Quickly," your three-year-old Ameer tells you, "the sand here is too soft. Run closer to the water and get better sand!"

Off you run and grab, with your tiny hands, as much sand as you can hold. But, as you run back, plop, plop, plop, you feel the sand slipping through your fingers and you can do nothing about it. In your haste, all the sand has slipped away. Bang. The competition is over. This is the analogy of our lives; this is the analogy of our time in Ramadan.

For many living in western countries, Ramadan is passed daily with 9 to 5 jobs or school, nights where we may or may not go for taraweeh, a peak at the TV (may Allah protect us), and the night is over. Then, back to work where people everywhere are eating and drinking from crystal water fountains. Blink. Ramadan is over.

The question of the hour is – how do we take full advantage of this gift of Allah? This is our topic – before the sands of Ramadan slip away.

How many years have we been fasting Ramadan? Ten, 15 or 40 years? Are we 10, 15 or 40 times better? Or, does it seem like we have arrived back at the drawing board every time Ramadan comes around? All acts of worship are for our own benefit! If we don't do it, harm befalls us, which is the way life was programmed.

Ramadan is no small matter. It is one of the pillars of this deen (Islam) and without it one's Islam would not be complete. In this month, RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam would intensify his worship of Allah ta'aala. In doing so, he laid the foundation for his ummah after him to emulate.

Ibn Al Qayyim rahimahu Allah wrote: "From his, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam's, blessed guidance in Ramadan, is that he used to intensify and diversify his actions of worship. So, for example, Jibreel used to rehearse the Qur'an with him during the nights of Ramadan. When Jibreel would visit him, he would intensify the amount of sadaqah that he would give. He, sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was the most generous out of all people and Ramadan was the time when he was most generous. In Ramadan, he would fill his time with sadaqah, treating people kindly, reciting Qur'an, performing salah, remembering Allah, and performing itikaaf" (Zaad Al Ma'aad).

Observers described the way Allah's Messenger sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam gave like ar-reeh al-mursalah – like the blessed wind. Why? The blessed wind, as they knew it, was a wind that brought coolness to everyone – no one was denied its blessing. Additionally, the blessed wind was not lazy in bringing its goodness to the people; it would come swiftly to all. This is how RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam was described, and this is how our service to humanity should be – swift and encompassing. Bi idhnillah.

Below are 10 ideas to help make the most of Ramadan, before it slips through our hands.

Idea #1: Compound Your Siyaam!

If you told your financial broker that you just want to keep money in the bank and save it, he would say, "You are wrong. Invest it in the stock market so your money will be compounded. You will earn multiple times what you put in." So now I ask the question: Wouldn't you love to get two times the reward of fasting Ramadan? How does that sound?

Zayd ibn Khaalid AlJuhaneer narrates that the Prophet sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:

"Whoever gives a fasting person (food) to break his or her fast, he (the one providing the food) will get the reward equivalent to the (fasting person's) reward, without diminishing anything from the reward of the (fasting person)."

How do we do this? Ask any Muslim relief agency if they have a 'feed a fasting person' program. Subhan Allah, you may find that it only costs \$1 to feed a person! So, for \$30 you could come out of Ramadan having doubled your reward.

And, we should not forget the needy in our city. We think that in a 'modern' western country or city there are no needy people. This is far from the truth. There are many needy families that are waiting to be discovered. Ask around and you will find a gold mine of people to help in your own backyard.

I speak about Washington, DC. If one was to have a food drive, all the food could go to needy Muslim families in DC and still not be enough! I've seen this with my own eyes. How blessed it would be to get the youth that just hang out in the back of the masjid during taraweeh to take on this task. They could organize the collection of the food and distribute it. It can happen! All it takes is a leader with vision to set this up for the youth, and all the good people who want to make a difference.

Idea #2: Operation Guide the Youth

Often in Ramadan there are khaatirahs, words of wisdom, halaqahs and reminders, all geared to the adults praying taraweeh. The youth it seems are being disrespectful by talking in the back of the masjid.

"Shhhhhsh!" someone shouts at them. "Listen or go outside (and we prefer if you just go outside)!" So, quietly they sneak out of the masjid and chat and chill all Ramadan. How eman boosting is that? Remember, Allah commands that you protect your wife and children.

Try this: Just like there are things for the adults, we could have Ramadan activities and reminders geared specifically for the youth. And, it need not be in the masjid. Let's say the youth like to chat and chill outside in the parking lot. Why not organize the activity there? Perhaps it could be on the basketball court or in the parking lot. Have a 5 minute khatirah, play games with them, and give them some noble projects to complete in Ramadan.

Again, making a difference like this needs a leader with a vision, one who recognizes that the youth are his or her responsibility. I pray that person is you!

Idea #3: TV Turnoff Month

Every parent knows that when they want their child to do well in their studies they tell them, "No TV!" If this is what we do for the dunya then how about someone who wants to excel in Ramadan?

"Fasting and the Qur'an will come and testify on behalf of the 'abd on the Day of Resurrection. The Fasting will say, 'O my lord, I denied him food and desires, so allow me to be a means for him to enter Paradise.' And the Qur'an will say, 'O my Lord, I denied him sleep at night so allow me to be a means for him to enter Paradise.' And (he will be entered into Paradise) because of those two"(Musnad Ahmad).

Try this: Announce in your household that Ramadan is the official TV Turnoff Month. Be an example for others and do fun and rewarding things instead. Visit people, take on a Ramadan feeding project, increase yourself in knowledge, etc. Turn off the TV and turn on life!

Idea #4: Dua' Time

Ramadan is the month of making du'a to Allah, an essential compliment to fasting. RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam said:

"There are three persons' du'a that will be accepted (by Allah). The fasting person, the oppressed

one, and the traveler."

Try this: Make a list of all your goals in life. Make a section for your (a) personal goals (b) spiritual goals (c) economic goals and (d) contribution goals. Everyday during Ramadan, take out your list and make du'a to Allah to grant you the tawfeeq to accomplish your goals. In sha Allah, you will attain your goals with hard work, both during and after Ramadan.

Idea #5: Parent Appreciation Month

We all know that the one who wakes us up for suhoor is our mom. I know that was true for me in my house growing up. If it wasn't for her alarm clock, her early morning cooking, her motherly love to go and wake everyone up, our iftars would have become our suhoors. If you are living away from your parents, you know what I'm talking about.

Remember the hadith of the person who doesn't reach Ramadan with forgiveness? The end part of the hadith says they found their parents in old age and they were not a means for him to enter Jannah!

So why not announce it loud and clear this month, "Thank you, Mom! Thank you, Dad!" Let's take care of them this month with extra calls, extra hugs, and extra love.

Idea #6: Masjid Power Hour

During Ramadan, why not spend a few more moments in the masjid before taking off. This could be done after Fajr or Asr. Sit back, grab a Qur'an and remember Allah. As your time in the masjid increases, bi idhnillaah, your love and heart attachment will increase as well. Make this your personal masjid power hour.

Idea #7: Bad Habit Buster

Some people may have a smoking problem or a TV addiction. When Ramadan comes around, many of them say, "I'm going to train myself to stop smoking or to stop watching excessive TV by abandoning it throughout Ramadan."

So you don't have a smoking problem huh? Well everyone has some bad habit and everyone has some recurring sin they pray they could desist from. Make Ramadan the training month by telling yourself to go without this sin for the entire month. Then, if Allah grants you tawfeeq to complete the month, you should continue to pray to Allah to keep you away from the sin after Ramadan.

Idea #8: The Gift Groove

Have you ever noticed how beloved a bottle of perfume is when it is handed out by a little four-year-old Muslim? Everyone loves a gift.

Why not take this a step forward? Go to your local Islamic bookstore and request a bulk purchase of some beneficial Islamic materials – something in the \$1 range. Then, hand it out to everyone that comes to your masjid. Bi idhnillaah, you will find for the little effort you put, people throughout Ramadan will be learning from that gift.

Idea #9: Ramadan Muslims Convert!

It is true that on the first day of Ramadan, a considerable amount of Muslims multiply in the masjid. It is also a sad moment on the first day after Ramadan, that the masjid attendance drops significantly. This idea is Operation No More Ramadan Muslims. We want people all year long!

A man came to Ibn Abbas while he was doing i'tikaaf in the masjid and asked him for his assistance. Ibn Abbas stood to leave with the man and people around him warned, "But you are in i'tikaaf." He replied, "To assist my brother in fulfilling his need is more beloved to me than to perform i'tikaaf for 2

months in The Masjid of RasulAllah sal Allaahu alayhi wa sallam."

Try this: Make a 'compassion crew' that reaches out specifically to Ramadan Muslims. Extra special attention is showered on them and roles of responsibility are delegated to them so that they can participate more in the masjid. Invite them to special iftars where they are the center of attention. With this extra attention and responsibility, bi idhnillaah, every month will be Ramadan for them, and the masjid will be full all year.

Idea #10: Home Halaqah

Muslim families often keep their worship for the masjid, so why not make Muslim family time at home. It could work like this: After taraweeh or Asr, the family gathers together for 15 minutes. There are many things you could do in your halaqah, however, the main point is that you set time aside for it.

For example, each family member may recite a few verses of Qur'an. Or, one of the kids can read a story of the Sahaabaa so that all family members can be reminded. Or, each family member can speak about the blessings of Allah upon them and what they have in their lives for which they are thankful. Just 15 minutes for the home halaqah. For the entire family, bi idhnillaah, it will be a spring of eman.

To review, the 10 ideas to enhance your Ramadan are:

Idea #1: Compound Your Siyaam!

Idea #2: Operation Guide the Youth

Idea #3: Turnoff TV Month

Idea #4: Du'a Time

Idea #5: Parent Appreciation Month

Idea #6: Masjid Power Hour

Idea #7: Bad Habit Buster

Idea #8: The Gift Groove

Idea #9: Ramadan Muslims, Convert!

Idea #10: Home Halaqah

The past saw Muslims that spent their nights of Ramadan awake praying to Allah. It saw days where people, for the sake of Allah, went thirsty. They knew that this season may never return on them and they heard Allah's words "Ayyaman Ma'doodaat (a limited number of days)." Don't let the sand of Ramadan slip away.

by Muhammad Alshareef