38064 - Why Do Muslims Fast?

the question

I live in England, and I often get asked by many Non-Muslims, why do Muslims fast? I know that I should know this answer, but I do not know what to say exactly. What should I give as an answer?

Summary of answer

Muslims fast the month of Ramadan because Allah has commanded them to do so. Therefore, Muslims worship Allah through fasting which is beloved to Allah and which He has enjoined upon us.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Why do Muslims fast during Ramadan?

We Muslims fast the month of Ramadan because Allah has commanded us to do so. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Observing As-Sawm (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqun (pious).” [al-Baqarah 2:183]

So we worship Allah by doing this act of worship which is beloved to Allah and which He has enjoined upon us.

The believers hasten to obey the commands of Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), in obedience to His words (interpretation of the meaning):

“The only saying of the faithful believers, when they are called to Allah (His Words, the Quran) and

His Messenger, to judge between them, is that they say: ‘We hear and we obey.’ And such are the successful (who will live forever in Paradise).” [al-Nur 24:51]

“It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed into a plain error.” [al-Ahzab 33:36]

Out of His wisdom, Allah has prescribed a variety of acts of worship

“It is by His wisdom that Allah has prescribed a variety of acts of worship, so as to test people with regard to how they will obey all these commands. Will they only choose to do that which suits them, or will they do that which pleases Allah? If we think about the five acts of worship: testimony of faith, prayer, zakah, fasting and pilgrimage, we will see that some of them are purely physical, some are purely financial, some are both, so that the miser will become distinct from the generous. For some people it may be easy for them to pray one thousand rak’ahs but not to give a single dirham; for others it may be easy to give a thousand dirhams but not to pray a single rak’ahs. So Islam came to prescribe a variety of acts of worship so as to determine who will follow in obedience to the command of Allah and who will follow only that which suits him.

Prayer , for example, is a purely physical action, but its prerequisites require some expenditure, such as the water for wudu, and clothes to cover the ‘awrah. These are not part of the prayer but they are its prerequisites.

Zakah is purely financial, but physical actions are required to fulfil this duty such as calculating one's wealth and transferring the zakah to the poor and needy. These are not part of zakah but they are its prerequisites.

Hajj involves spending wealth and physical action, except for the people of Makkah who may not need money, but they are very few compared with those who live in Makkah.

Jihad for the sake of Allah may require both money and physical effort. A person may spend money for the sake of Allah and not fight, or he may go and fight but not spend money.

Commands are of two types: commands to refrain from things that man is inclined towards, and commands to spend that are precious.

Refraining from things that are loved includes fasting, and expenditure of things that are loved includes zakah. Wealth is something that is loved and no one spends the wealth that he loves except for something that is loved even more.

The same applies to refraining from things that are loved, for a person may like to spend a thousand dirhams, but not fast a single day, or vice versa." (Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymin, al-Sharh al-Mumti', 6/190)

Thirdly:

Wisdom of prescribing fasting in Islam

There is another great reason why fasting is prescribed, which has been discussed in part in the answer to question no. 26862 .

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymin was asked about the reason why fasting was enjoined?

He replied:

"If we read the words of Allah (interpretation of the meaning):

" O you who believe! Observing As-Sawm (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqun (pious)." [al-Baqarah 2:183]

we will know the reason why fasting was prescribed, which is taqwa (piety) and submission to Allah. Taqwa means giving up haraam things, and in general terms includes both doing what is commanded and abstaining from what is forbidden. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever does not give up false speech and acting upon it and offensive speech and behaviour, Allah has no need of his giving up his food and drink." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 6057(See also questions no. 37658 and 37989 .

Things to avoid while fasting

Based on this, it is important for the one who is fasting to carry out religious duties and avoid haram things in word and deed. So he should not backbite about people, tell lies, or spread malicious gossip among them, or engage in haraam transactions, and he should avoid all haraam things.

If a person does that for a whole month, the rest of the year will go well, but unfortunately in the case of many of those who fast, there is no difference between a day when they fast and a day when they do not; they behave as they usually do, neglecting obligatory duties and doing forbidden things. You do not see the dignity that is to be expected of the fasting person. These actions do not invalidate their fast but they do detract from its reward and may cancel out the reward altogether. (Fatawa Arkan al-Islam, p. 451)

And Allah knows best.