Fasting earns great reward. A Qudsi Hadith states;

“All actions a human being does are his with the exception of fasting which belongs to Me. I reward it accordingly.”

This is indeed a great promise. When Allah rewards an action as purely His, then the reward is limitless. It is given by the one whose generosity is not measured by percentage, multiplication or any other measure. It is commensurate only with His glory. It is sufficient to remember here that people normally weigh their actions according to their position. People always think ‘it is inappropriate of a person in my position to do this or to do that’. If the reward is given according to Allah’s position, then we do not have to think about its extent. We have only to remember that Allah’s kindness knows no boundaries. It is useful to mention here that another version of the same Qudsi Hadith may be translated as follows;

“Fasting belongs to Me and it is Me who rewards it.”

One may ask here why fasting has been singled out as belonging to Allah when all acts of worship are dedicated to Him. Moreover, any good action a believer does is normally done for Allah’s sake. All scholars agree that this is because fasting cannot be done in order to gain favor with people, or for boastfulness, show-off or deception. This is due to the nature of fasting which is done by abstention rather than by any positive action. It is not possible for anyone to identify a fasting person by his or her appearance. All other acts of worship can be seen by people. Hence, they may be done for purposes other than to please Allah and gain...
His reward. Not so fasting which can be known only if the person who fasts tells other people of his fasting. If a person goes around and tells other people of his voluntary fasting, then he may be seeking to win favors from them. But this is achieved through the act of telling them, not through fasting itself. Thus, when a person fasts for the sake of Allah alone, and does not tell people of the fact, his action is said to be dedicated purely to Allah. It is this fact which earns the person concerned that limitless reward. The Prophet (pbuh) also teaches us that there is another side to the reward which fasting earns. He tells us that certain actions like prayers and charity (sadaqa) or Zakah ensure the forgiveness of past sins. Fasting is His on the list of these actions. There are numerous Hadiths which confirm this fact. We are told by the Prophet (pbuh) that proper fasting, done with sincerity and devotion, ensures the forgiveness of all sins committed in the preceding year, with the exception of cardinal sins. Indeed, some Hadiths do not make that last exception. The Prophet (pbuh) Says:

“Whoever fasts in Ramadan motivated by his faith and with dedication will have all his past sins forgiven.”

It is for this reason that Muslims prepare themselves for the arrival of Ramadan with the resolve to make all their worship, fasting and prayers included, free of any trace of hypocrisy. They are keen to achieve the degree of dedication which ensures the maximum reward from Allah. After all, we always commit mistakes, and we always face the temptation to fall in sin. It is only natural that we should be keen to have our sins and mistakes forgiven. When we have such clear statements from the Prophet (pbuh) that fasting ensures such forgiveness, then we find the difficulty of fasting very easy indeed. Hunger and thirst are no longer hard to bear.

Musk gives one the best smells known to man. All people like it especially because it overpowers any bad smell in the vicinity. When musk is considered inferior to the smell of the mouth of a fasting person, the honor Allah gives to those who fast appear to be great indeed. We should not feel here that this statement is given in a figurative way. Allah is not affected by smells, foul or pleasant. He does not need a good smell in His presence, either to expel any bad smell around or for its own sake. It is common, however, for Allah and the Prophet (pbuh) to use metaphorical expressions in order...
to highlight a certain notion to us. What the statement means is that Allah rates the mouth smell of a fasting person higher than we rate the smell of musk. Some scholars suggest that the angels find the mouth smell of fasting human beings better than we find the smell of musk. Whatever it is, this statement is meant to strengthen our resolve to fast with dedication because fasting achieves for us such a position when our smell is better than musk.

When we consider such limitless reward and such moral value which are attached to fasting, who of us would want to fail to fast unless he lacks faith? The Prophet (pbuh), however, was keen to drive the point home to us. Consider the following Hadith;

“There is a door to heaven called Al-Rayyan through which only fasting people are admitted. It will be asked; where are the fasting people? They stand up. No one is admitted through that door except them. When they have entered, the door will be closed and no one else can get through it.”

While this Hadith indicates that fasting people have a special status on the Day of Judgment which merits the provision of a special door for them to be admitted into heaven, the name of that door is very significant. “Al-Rayyan” is an adjective which describes in normal usage something which is ripe, full of juice. It is normally used to describe fruit and vegetables which have fully ripened. Needless to say that a person who fasts throughout the day, particularly in the long days of summer, suffers from thirst. Nothing is dearer to him than a cool drink. When his gate to heaven is called Al-Rayyan, with all its associations and connotations of juice and ripened fruits, it is left for our imagination to have a picture of what awaits him inside heaven.

{the editor}

Those of us who fail the test sink into perpetual misery. While Islam wants us to work hard in order to build a high standard of life worthy of man, the creature, Allah has placed in charge of earth, it also aims to give us the right perspective, viewing this life and all that it offers as transitory. Hence, all possessions and life itself can be sacrificed for a higher goal.

Umm Al-Dahdah and her husband and family were among the early Muslims from Madinah. After Islam began to establish itself in Madinah, the Prophet (pbuh) sent his companion, Mus’ab ibn Umair, to teach the new Muslim converts there the Qur’an and how to lead an Islamic life. Among the first people to convert to Islam at the times was Thabit ibn Al-Dahdah, his wife Umm Al-Dahdah and their entire family.

When the Prophet (pbuh) immigrated to Madinah with his companions from Makkah, the process of learning about Islam among the Ansar took a much faster pace. The people there tried to catch up with their brethren from Makkah in understanding Islamic principles and putting them into effect.
Thabit read the Qur’anic verse that says: “Who will offer Allah a generous loan, which He will repay in multiples and will generously reward him?” He said to the Prophet (pbuh): “How come Allah asks us for a loan when He is in no need for anyone?” The Prophet (pbuh) said: “He wants it so that He will admit you to heaven in return.” Thabit said: “If I give a loan to my Lord, will He guarantee me heaven as well as to my children?” The Prophet said that it was so. Thabit said: “Give me your hand; I have two orchards; one in the highland and one in the lowland. I have no other possession. I am making them both a loan to Allah.” The Prophet said: “Make one of them for Allah and hold on to the other for your family’s living.” Thabit said: “Then be my witness that I am making the better one for Allah. It is an orchard that contains 600 date trees.” The Prophet (pbuh) said: “Then Allah will reward you for it with admission into heaven.”

What Thabit did was exceptional by any standard. Yet what was his wife’s attitude?

We can imagine any woman’s reaction when her husband tells her that he donated half his property to a noble cause. She would naturally think of the effect of such donation on her children’s lives. Yet Umm Al-Dahdah said to her husband:

“You have done a profitable deal.”

She immediately gathered her children who were in that orchard, emptied their pockets of any dates they had gathered, and even took whatever was their hands. She told them that that orchard no longer belonged to them.

In the Battle of Uhud, when Muslims were in chaos, Thabit was one of the few who remained steadfast. He gathered a group of the Ansar fighters around him and fought hard to repel the unbelievers’ attack. They were heavily outnumbered by enemy forces. He as one of the Muslim martyrs. When the news of his death was broken to his wife, she did not lament, because she knew that a martyr remains alive in heaven. She was keen to know that the Prophet (pbuh) was safe. When she saw him, she said: “Any tragedy is light, as long as you are safe.”

We see her attitude toward sacrificing life and property. In both cases she was exemplary, demonstrating that Islamic values were deeply rooted in her heart.

Let us try to paint a picture of one day in the life of the Prophet (pbuh) of Islam. For certain, he wakes up well before dawn, when the dark curtain of the night still covers everything. As he begins to move, he says: “Praise be to Allah who has returned my spirit to me, given me physical strength and permitted me to glorify Him.” Consider how he welcomes life, full of optimism: “Praise be to Allah who has returned my spirit to me.”

The life we are given is a blessing for which we thank Allah and we must use well. It offers a chance of success for whoever aims to succeed. Yet Allah reminds His servants of the blessing He has given them in the form of sunrise and sunset: “It is Allah who has made for you the night in which to rest, and the day to make you see. Allah is limitless in His bounty to man, but most people do not give thanks.” Great is life when it is attached with good health. It is then that the body organs can function well, without trouble. A Muslim will then move about to willingly fulfill his duties well. It is for this that we praise and thank Allah for giving us good health.

We need to reflect on the Prophet’s (pbuh) early words as he praises Allah for “permitting me to glorify Him”.

STARTING THE DAY WITH PRAYERS
Following the examples of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh)
Can we imagine a more polite way in addressing the Lord? Here is an acknowledgement that a new day means permission to resume worship right at the break of dawn.

Mohammed (pbuh) Allah’s ever grateful servant begins his praises using words that impact assurance of faith and pure love in every letter. He says these words morning and evening: “My Lord, I pray You to grant me sound health in this life and in the life to come, to forgive me and to give me purity in faith, life, family and property. My Lord, grant me a cover of my flaws and reassurance in time of fear. Protect me from what lies ahead of me, behind me, to my right, to my left and above me. I appeal to Your greatness to protect me from any danger that lies beneath me.”

The Prophet (pbuh) urged every Muslim to say as he begins or ends his day: “My Lord, You know all that is beyond human perception and all that is witnessed by anyone; You are the Originator of the heavens and the earth; You are the Lord and owner of all. I bear witness that there is no deity other than You. I seek refuge with You from the evil that is within me and from the maneuverings of Satan.”

As they start their day, the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions say: “We have started this day in the original state of submission to Allah, with the pure word of faith, following the religion of our Prophet Mohammad and the creed of our father Abraham who followed the pure faith and never associated partners with Allah.”

That the Prophet’s companions should assert that they follow the religion of Prophet Mohammad is perfectly understandable. Why does the Prophet himself say the same? This occurs in many supplications the Prophet (pbuh) used to say, always asserting his belief in his prophet-hood or in the truth of his message. I feel that this serves more than one purpose. The first is that it confirms his commitment to implement what he preaches. Many are the religious leaders who appear to consider that their task is to teach others what to do. As for themselves, they consider themselves above liability. Another purpose is to spite unbelievers by asserting that Islam is the faith of unquestionable truth. Moreover, it is an acknowledgement of the grace of Allah has bestowed on His messenger, and an expression of gratitude and happiness for being chosen for his noble tacks.

(Ibn Saleh)
Abdullah ibn Massoud married Zainab bint Abu Mu’aawiyah (may Allah always be pleased with her), a woman from the Thaqeef tribe. She was a good wife, skilled in handiwork and eager to learn. She used to make things with her hands and sell them to earn some money which she used to help her relatives who were poor. Her husband was exemplary in his attitude of dignity. He encouraged her to seek knowledge and to acquire greater insight into Islam, putting what she learns into practice.

Zainab heard the Prophet (pbuh) addressing women, telling them to donate to charity, even if they have to sell their jewelry for that. She came back home and said to her husband: “You are a man of limited means, and the Prophet has told us to donate to charity. Go to him and ask whether I can pay my donation to you. Otherwise, I will have to pay it to some other people.” Her husband said: “You better go and ask him.”

Zainab reports: “I went to see him and at his door I found an Ansari woman who had come to ask the same question. We were rather apprehensive of going in. Bilal, however, came over. So we said to him: ‘Go to the Prophet and tell him that two women are at the door who would like to know whether they can pay their Zakat to their husbands and to orphan children they are bringing up. Do not tell him who we are.’ Bilal went in and put the question to the Prophet (pbuh). The Prophet asked him who the two women were. Bilal said: ‘A woman from the Ansar and Zainab’. The Prophet said” ‘Which Zainab?’ He answered” ‘Abdullah’s wife’. The Prophet (pbuh) said: ‘They will have double reward; one for their kindness to relatives and one for Zakat.”’ (Al-Bukhari)

The Prophet (pbuh) sets a principle in this Hadith which makes relatives more entitled to charity than others. There is, however, a main condition that applies here, which is that the relative who benefits by our Zakat is not one whom we are required to support. This means that a person cannot pay his Zakat to his parents, grandparents, children or grandchildren because he is duty bound to support them if they are poor. Nor can a man pay his Zakat to his wife, but she may pay her Zakat to her husband. This is because in Islam a husband is required to support his wife, while she has no similar duty. Both have full independence and complete authority over their separate properties. We note here how Abdullah ibn Massoud wanted his wife to go and ask the Prophet herself, because he realized that she would be free to ask about any details she wanted to know. Moreover, whatever she would learn from the Prophet would be better ingrained in her mind. Such encouragement enabled Zainab to learn more and become more reliable. She reported eight Hadiths she heard from the Prophet. It was her reliable knowledge that motivated her husband, who was one of the most learned companions of the Prophet (pbuh), to acknowledge her role after his death. He wrote in his will: “My executors are Al-Zubair ibn Awwam and his son Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair. They have a free hand in all this. No daughter of mine may be married without their knowledge. Nothing of all this shall be withheld from my wife Zainab.”