

Chapter Two

RITUALS OF WORSHIP

Rituals of worship in Islam include:

- 1- Prayer**
- 2- Zakat (Charity)**
- 3- Fasting**
- 4- Hajj (Pilgrimage)**

SALAT OR PRAYER

Concepts discussed:

- 1-The Five obligatory prayers each day**
- 2- The rationale and wisdom of prayer**
- 3- Optional prayers**
- 4- Why do Muslims pray this way ?**
- 5- The value and rewards of prayer**

The five obligatory daily prayers

Muslims pray five times every day. These obligatory prayers are:

- 1- Fajr (Dawn) prayer before sunrise**
- 2- Zuhr (Noon) prayer**
- 3- Asr (Afternoon) prayer**

- 4- Maghrib (Sunset) prayer
- 5- Eisha'a (Night) prayer

How prayer is performed?

There are three phases in each Raka'a:

- Standing phase where the Qur'an is recited starting with Al-Fatiha (opening chapter of the Qur'an).
- Then bowing down (Rukou') where the name of God is glorified
- Then prostration (Sojoud) where the name of God is glorified and Muslims send peace and greetings on Prophet's Muhammad and Abraham and their followers

Fajr (Dawn) prayer

Consists of two Rak'aa and must be prayed from the beginning of dawn but certainly before sunrise. It is an important prayer attended by the Angels of night and day who come together at dawn and in the afternoon. The recitation of the Qur'an at Dawn prayer is duly noted by the Angels:

﴿ أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنِ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ

مَشْهُودًا ﴾

Establish regular prayers at the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer and reading: for the prayer and reading in the morning carry their testimony.

Al-Isra'a 17 : 78

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (The Angels of morning and the Angels of night both are present at two times: Dawn prayer and afternoon prayer; They go to heaven and their Lord asks them, and He knows everything, how did you find my servants? They reply: we found them praying, and we came back and they were also praying)

Bokhari

It is difficult to train yourself to wake early in the morning, day in and day out, in order to pray Dawn prayer at its proper time. It shows conviction and commitment. At summer time, this means waking up at 5-6 AM in the morning.

Zuhr (Noon) prayer

This prayer is 4 Raka'a and is around noon time. In summer it is about an hour later. Its time extends till before Asr or afternoon prayer, which is around 4-5 PM, depending on the season.

Asr (afternoon) prayer

Is at 4 PM in fall and winter, and around 5 PM in spring and summer. It also is 4 Raka'a.

Maghrib (sunset) prayer

It consists of 3 Raka'a, and is prayed shortly after the sun sets. It may be 6 PM in winter or 8 PM in summer.

Eisha'a (night) prayer

It is 4 Raka'a and is prayed about 1 ½ hours after Maghrib prayer, around 7 -7 30 Pm in winter, and 9 30-10 Pm in summer.

Standing phase of prayer

When standing one faces the Ka'Ba (the sacred mosque) in Macca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka' Ba was built by Abraham and Ishama'il to praise God :

﴿وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ﴾

And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: for Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.

Al-Baqara 2 : 127

﴿رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

"Our Lord! Make of us Muslims bowing to Thy (Will); and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Thy (Will); and show us our places for the

celebration of (due) rites; and turn unto us (in Mercy); for Thou art the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

Al-Baqara 2 : 128

God showed prophet Abraham the foundation of the sacred house, implying that it was built before:

﴿ إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Bakka; full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings:

Al-Imran 3 : 96

The person praying then raises his hands saying “Allahu Akbar “God is greatest). In his heart, he says “I intend to pray Salat Al-Fajr (Dawn prayer)” for example, or other prayers. Then he recites the opening chapter of the Qur’an, called Al-Fatiha. This Surah (chapter) consists of 7 short verses and must be recited in Arabic in each Raka’a. Since Muslims pray 17 Raka’a every day, it is not difficult to memorize seven short verses.

﴿ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴾

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Al-Fatiha 1 : 1

﴿ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds;

Al-Fatiha 1 : 2

﴿ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴾

Most Gracious, Most Merciful;

Al-Fatiha 1 : 3

﴿ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴾

Master of the Day of Judgment.

Al-Fatiha 1 : 4

﴿إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ﴾

Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek,
Al-Fatiha 1 : 5

﴿أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ﴾

Show us the straight way.
Al-Fatiha 1 : 6

﴿صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ﴾

The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray.
Al-Fatiha 1 : 7

This Surah summarizes the most important concepts in Islam:

- 1- The Oneness of God and His attributes
- 2- Our accountability to God
- 3- We seek His help and guidance
- 4- We wish to follow God's way and to gain His pleasure

After the Fatiha, a Muslim recite few verses of the Qur'an of what he has memorized. Longer recitation is recommended during Dawn prayer. Then the one praying says "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest) then goes down bowing

The bowing phase or Ruko'o

One bends his back and places his hands on his knees, saying "Subhana rabeyya al-azeem" (glory be to my Lord, the most great) three times or five times. Then goes down in prostration

Prostration phase or Sojoud

The person praying goes down on his knees and places his hands on either side of his head, saying "Subhana Rabeyya Al-A'la" (Glory be to my Lord, most high), three or five times. He can also add a short prayer as long as he does not recite Qur'anic verses in his Sojoud. In the second and fourth Raka'a the person praying recites Al-Taheyyat (Salutations or greetings).

The English translation of the Arabic words is as follows : (All greetings belong to Allah, as well as all prayers and good deeds; Greeting and peace on you O prophet of God, and God's mercy and blessings; Peace and greetings on us and on God's righteous servants. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger). In the fourth Raka'a the second part of Al-Taheyyat is recited. Its English translation is as follows: (O God send peace and greetings to Muhammad and those who follow him, as you have sent peace and greetings on Abraham and his followers You are worthy of all praise and glory; O God bless Muhammad and his followers as you have blessed Abraham and his followers in the world, You are indeed worthy of all praise and glory)

Muslims pray as the Prophet did pray, for he said (Pray as you see me pray). He was shown how to pray by the Angel Jebreel.

The wisdom of prayer or why we are supposed to pray?

The Qur'an gives several reasons or rationale for prayer:

- 1- Obeying God and what He has commanded
- 2- When we pray we recite the Arabic Qur'an which is God's words, and we listen to his instructions and guidance
- 3- Prayer protects us from sin and shameful deeds
- 4- Prayer teaches commitment and organization as well as placing our priorities correctly
- 5- Prayer in congregation allows Muslims to know each other and work together and help one another
- 6- Prayer teaches devotion, concentration and submission to God
- 7- We are promised a great reward for being active in safeguarding our prayers.

Obeying God's command to pray

The Qur'an orders Muslims to establish regular prayer and praises those who safeguard their prayers:

﴿ وَأَقِمُّوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴾

And be steadfast in prayer; practice regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship).

Al-Baqara 2 : 43

﴿وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَوَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ﴾

And who (strictly) guard their prayers;
Al-Mumenoun 23 : 9

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that one of the best deeds beloved to God is "prayer at the proper time" Bokhari & Muslim
To pray the five obligatory prayers promptly at the proper time requires resolve and commitment and understanding our priorities. When the time of prayer comes, one should leave his preoccupation with other activities and hasten to pray and remember God.

When we pray we recite the Arabic Qur'an which is the word of God

During prayer a Muslim is reciting the Arabic Qur'an and listening to God guiding him and instructing him. The Qur'an serves to shape our character and behavior, and focuses our goals and objectives in life. It reminds us of our responsibility and accountability. It gives us hope and strength as we realize that we are not alone, for God is with us guiding our steps.

The Qur'an answers our needs and fills our heart with security and contentment in order to face difficult situations.

If only people would listen to and understand the words of the Qur'an that they are reciting in their prayers! But many just utter the words and go through the motions in prayer, and such prayers have no effect on their faith or behavior.

﴿كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ﴾

(Here is) a Book which We have sent down unto thee, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its Signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition.

SA D 38 : 29

Our responsibility towards the Qur'an is to understand it and apply its guidelines in our life. Then we should teach it to others, and defend it from those who wish to distort its message.

Prayer protects us from sin and shameful deeds

When we prepare ourselves for prayer, and while we are praying, and for a time after we have prayed, such prayer is supposed to protect us for the entire time because we are actively worshipping God and remembering Him. It is not likely that we would approach or commit sin or do a shameful deed during these times of prayer. This is true if our prayers had the desired effect, which is to increase our faith and reinforce our responsibility and accountability to God.

﴿ أَتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ ۖ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ ۚ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ ﴾

Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to thee, and establish regular Prayer: for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of Allah is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt. And Allah knows the (deeds) that ye do.

Al-Ankabut 29 : 45

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stressed the value and importance of regular prayer. He sought comfort and solace in prayer whenever he was distressed or facing a difficult situation.

Prayer teaches organization, commitment and placing our priorities correctly

When the time for prayer comes a Muslim who understands his commitment and responsibility to God leaves his preoccupation and performs that particular prayer. Muslims pray five times every day: in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, at sunset and at night. Therefore, to plan your time and schedule accordingly is important. It is more important to pray than to watch a game or a movie. At work, we organize our time and effort so that our prayers are safeguarded without interfering with the work that we do or our commitment to

whatever activity we engage in. It is not difficult to put aside 10-15 minutes at lunch time for observing our prayers. The same is true of the afternoon prayer which can be done before we wind down our activities heading home. Obviously our Dawn prayers and sunset and night prayers can be done easily at home or in the mosque.

Muslims can pray anywhere. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (The whole earth has been made for me (and my followers) as a clean appropriate place to pray in). Therefore Muslims can pray in homes other than their own. I have requested permission from my hosts and prayed in the homes of Christian and Jewish friends. Muslims can pray in hospitals, temples, churches and on the road whenever they are at the time of prayer. The main requirement is that the place be clean. In addition, prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us not to pray at grave sites. This prohibition may stem from fear of glorifying the dead.

Prayer in congregation allows Muslims to know each other and help one another and cooperate with each other. It also teaches equality of mankind.

Muslims pray an obligatory congregational prayer each Friday. This Jumua' a prayer replaces the noon prayer on Friday. It is a requirement on male Muslims who are healthy and able to come to the mosque (place where Muslims pray). It can be attended by women as well, but this prayer is not obligatory on women since taking care of their children takes precedence.

Muslims are encouraged to pray in the mosque when they are able to and the prophet (PBUH) told us that the reward of prayer in congregation is 25 times that of praying alone. The goal is for Muslims to know one another, talk, discuss common issues, work together and help each other.

In the fasting month of Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to pray night prayer and optional prayer in the mosque. Also at the time of Eid (feast celebration) prayer in the mosque is recommended to express thanks to God for His blessing and grace.

When Muslims stand in prayer in rows, shoulder to shoulder, and foot to foot, beside each other, they are reminded that before God they are equal. There should be no distinction for a rich person over a poor person, or for a powerful person over a weak person. This teaches humility for everyone stands before God equally seeking His guidance and blessing.

Prayer in congregation also teaches unity and the power that many believers can generate when their hearts are united and individuals work together with devotion and sincerity. Many projects that serve the community cannot be accomplished through individual effort alone, but can be done if the community pulls its resources and people forget their differences and work together.

Prayer teaches devotion, concentration and submission to God

The Qur'an describes people of faith as obedient, concentrating in their prayers and devoted to God:

﴿ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾

The Believers must (eventually) win through,
Al-Mumenoun 23 : 1

﴿ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ﴾

Those who humble themselves in their prayers;
Al-Mumenoun 23 : 2

Those who are faithful in their prayers feel how much they are indebted to God and that they owe everything to Him. They forsake their beds of sleep at night to pray to Him in adoration and complete submission:

﴿ إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ ﴾

As to the Righteous, they will be in the midst of Gardens and Springs,
Adh-Dhareyat 51 : 15

﴿ءَاخِذِينَ مَا ءَاتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ مُحْسِنِينَ﴾

Taking joy in the things which their Lord gives them, because, before then, they lived a good life.

Adh-Dhareyat 51 : 16

﴿كَانُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ﴾

They were in the habit of sleeping but little by night,

Adh-Dhareyat 51 : 17

﴿وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ﴾

And in the hours of early dawn, they (were found) praying for Forgiveness;

Adh-Dhareyat 51 : 18

And :

﴿تَتَجَافَىٰ جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ﴾

Their limbs do forsake their beds of sleep, the while they call on their Lord, in Fear and Hope: and they spend (in charity) out of the sustenance which We have bestowed on them.

As-Sajda 32 : 16

We are promised a great reward for our prayers

Our prayers atone for our sins and increase our reward. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave the example of the five daily prayers as that of a river that a person praying is washing from, and asked: (if he is washing himself five times every day, does he still have any dirt left ?); then he said (This is the example of the five prayers each day, God remits your sins through your prayers) Bokhari.

Each letter of the Qur'an that we recite in our prayers or in reading the Qur'an is rewarded a good deed, and each good deed atones for 10 bad deeds. As Muslims recite the Fatiha 17 times each day, and it has more than 120 letters, then the reward for just reading the opening chapter of the Qur'an is about 2000 good deeds each day, more if we recite other verses in the Qur'an.

The best reward of prayer and reciting the Qur'an is to open our hearts to God's message and to turn to Him seeking His forgiveness and blessing. If our prayers help us become better human beings, aware of our accountability and responsibility in helping others, then it served its purpose.

Some people go through the motions of prayer with no real effect on their character or behavior. Their hearts are dead, and their prayers did not help them or serve any useful purpose. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that there are some whose prayers are not lifted above their heads or accepted.

Why do Muslims pray this way?

Some may question why Muslims follow the three phases in their prayer: standing, bowing and prostrating? and why only the Arabic Qur'an is allowed in prayer? and why not just call on God in whatever manner you wish to?

Muslim's prayer is structured in such way because of a direct order from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he said: (Pray as you see me pray), and he also said: (Take your rites after me). The Prophet was taught to pray in this particular way by the Angel of revelation. Therefore, it is a Divine revelation and direct order from God that cannot be ignored or changed.

The Arabic Qur'an is used in prayer because the Arabic Qur'an has been safeguarded from alteration as promised by God, in contrast to previous Divine revelations. The Qur'an that Muslims recite in their prayers today is the same Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from God:

﴿ إِنَّا خَشِئْنَا نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴾

We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption).

Al-Hijr 15 : 9

During prayer we cannot use our own words. We can only recite the Arabic Qur'an , the literal words of God. Outside our prayers we can call on God using our own words, or the Du'a of Prophet Muhammad

(PBUH) , or use verses of the Qur'an that tell us how to call on God. This form of prayer to God is called Du'a in Islam, and is different from a Muslim's prayer which must follow a certain format and in which only the Arabic Qur'an is recited.

Only the Arabic Qur'an is used in prayer and not the English translation of the meaning, because any translation is human interpretation of God's words. As humans we are fallible and make mistakes, but God is infallible and His words cannot be changed or altered.

Optional prayers

In addition to the five obligatory prayers each day, Muslims are encouraged to offer additional optional prayers each day. These are:

- 1- 2 raka'a before Dawn prayer
- 2- 2 or 4 Raka'a before and 2 or 4 Raka'a after Noon prayer
- 3- 2 Raka'a after sunset prayer
- 4- 2 Raka'a after night prayer
- 5- 3 Raka'a or more before going to bed

In total the optional prayers may be 10 or more Raka'a

We are rewarded for optional prayers, but are not held accountable if we miss them. In contrast, we are rewarded for our obligatory prayers, and we are accountable if we miss any obligatory prayer. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (The first thing that a person is asked to account for is his prayers. If they are good, the rest of his deeds should be good; if his prayers were not good or adequate, the rest of his deeds will not be good) .

Zakat (Obligatory Charity)

Zakat (obligatory charity) is the third pillar of Islam and is an obligation on Muslims who can afford to give charity. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said to his companion Moa'dh: (Take from the wealthy among them a charity to be given to the poor among them) Bokhari & Muslim. In other words it is an obligation in order to recirculate the wealth of the community and establish social justice.

This obligatory charity or Zakat is not left to the generosity of the Muslim or his good heart. Rather it is a personal responsibility and acknowledgment that what we have in wealth was provided to us by God. And God has stated that the poor and needy has a certain right in our wealth.

We will discuss the following concepts :

- 1- Zakat is obligatory on those who can afford it
- 2- How much to give
- 3- The rationale and wisdom of Zakat
- 4- The ethics of giving charity
- 5- Optional charity

Zaka (obligatory charity) is obligatory on those who can afford to give

God favors some people over others as far as their earnings and how much money they have:

﴿وَاللَّهُ فَضَّلَ بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الرِّزْقِ فَمَا الَّذِينَ فُضِّلُوا بِرَادَىٰ رِزْقِهِمْ عَلَىٰ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَهُمْ فِيهِ سَوَاءٌ أَفَبِنِعْمَةِ اللَّهِ تَجْحَدُونَ﴾ (٦١)

Allah has bestowed His gifts of sustenance more freely on some of you than on others; those more favored are not going to throw back their gifts to those whom their right hands possess, so as to be equal in that respect. Will they then deny the favors of Allah?

Al-Anhal 16 1

We see people who are rich and others who are poor, still others in-between. This does not mean that the rich are favored by God or that the poor are forgotten by God. God can test and try us by poverty and by riches:

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ بِمَا ءَاتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ سَيُطَوَّقُونَ مَا بَخُلُوا بِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاثُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ﴾ (١٨)

And let not those who covetously withhold of the gifts which Allah hath given them of His Grace, think that it is good for them: nay, it will be the worse for them; soon shall the things which they covetously withheld be tied to their necks like a twisted collar, on the Day of Judgment. To Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

Al-Imran 3 : 180

All money belongs to God, we only have use of It during our lifetime, but we cannot take it with us to the grave. It is what we do with our money that counts, not how much money we have:

﴿ وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَّا تُنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاثُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَن أنْفَقَ مِن قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَتْلَ ؕ أُولَٰئِكَ أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أَنفَقُوا مِن بَعْدُ وَقَتَلُوا ؕ وَكُلًّا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْحُسْنَىٰ ؕ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ۝۱۸۰ ﴾

And what cause have ye why ye should not spend in the cause of Allah? For to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth. Not equal among you are those who spent (freely) and fought, before the Victory, (with those who did so later). Those are higher in rank than those who spent (freely) and fought afterwards. But to all has Allah promised a goodly (reward). And Allah is well acquainted with all that ye do.

Al-Hadeed 57 : 10

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that every human being will be asked account for four things on the Day of judgment: His whole life: what did he do with it? His youth when he was healthy and creative, did he put this energy to good use or abuse it? His money: where did he earn it and how did he spend it? And his knowledge, did he spread useful knowledge or keep it to himself? (Termedhi) .

Our poor relatives have a right in our money. The Qur'an explains that it is Allah who determines who will be rich and who will be poor. If we understand that our money actually belongs to God, and that

we are accountable, then it is our obligation to provide for our relatives and for the needy, since it is part of our faith and conviction:

﴿ أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾

See they not that Allah enlarges the provision and restricts it, to whomsoever He pleases? Verily in that are Signs for those who believe.

Ar-Rum 30 : 37

﴿ فَآتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴾

So give what is due to kindred, the needy, and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the Countenance, of Allah, and it is they who will prosper.

Ar-Rum 30 : 38

Those who are poor and not able to give Zakat in the form of money, can still avail themselves of this charity by helping those in need , or by giving sincere advice or by guiding or encouraging , or at least not by saying a bad word that puts down another person or hurt his feelings. All these are acts of charity.

How much to give in Zakat?

2.5 % of our income should be given in obligatory charity if we reach a certain level of income and are able to give. This Zakat is obligatory on Muslims and is not left to their good hearts or benevolent nature. There is a certain right for the poor and needy in their wealth, after all it all belongs to God, and He gave it to the rich as a loan, and they are accountable regarding their behavior and what they do with this money.

Muslims can give more in charity if they wish, and when there is real need for supporting a special project or other urgent needs. They are rewarded for their extra effort .

To Whom Zakat is given?

﴿ إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَمِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَفِي
الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَرَمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ
حَكِيمٌ ﴾

Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to the truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.

At-Tawba : 60

The Qur'an describes eight categories to whom Zakat is given

- 1- The poor
- 2- The needy
- 3- Those collecting the Zakat
- 4- Those recently converted to Islam
- 5- Those in Debt
- 6- To free the slaves
- 7- In the way of God
- 8- The traveler away from home

The verse ends by stating that this is an obligation from God, who knows and who is wise in His orders.

Many of these categories still exist today, but some are not applicable in our time. For example freeing the slaves is a noble goal that existed at a time when slavery was a fact of life, so the Qur'an encouraged Muslims to spend their money in abolishing this custom. Many of the Prophet's companions did that, a notable example is Abou Bakr who freed many slaves.

Spending our Zakat's money to correct social injustice like poverty and to fight oppression and to stand by the needy is a noble goal.

Debt can be a tremendous burden that weighs heavily on the heart and mind of an individual, and to relieve his debt is to give him his freedom.

In the way of God is not limited to Helping those who are in Jihad in the cause of God, or helping a pilgrim accomplish the ritual of Hajj (pilgrimage), but is more inclusive. It may mean helping institutions like schools or centers of higher learning that provide a useful service to the community. It may mean building roads or clinics, or any other activity that helps the community. Our understanding of this important avenue of Zakat should not be restricted to the opinions or interpretation of earlier Muslim scholars who lived in a different environment and did not face our challenges or our current problems. If they lived in our times they would give us a different interpretation.

Zakat money should be used primarily in the community from which it was collected, but there are exceptions. If the need in the local community has been met, and there are other communities in dire need, then this Zakat money, collected locally, can be transferred to address the needs of those in a different location. Earlier scholars differed with one another regarding this matter of Jurisprudence, and as long as there is legitimate rationale and urgent need we should follow the spirit for giving charity, which is to help the poor and needy, regardless where they are.

If the needs of Muslims are met, there is no reason in my view why this charity cannot be given to non-Muslims who are in need of help. Muslim governments in the past guaranteed self-dignity for non-Muslims living under Muslim rule, and provided for the young, elderly and infirm.

The wisdom and rationale of Zakat

- 1- To help the poor and needy
- 2- To correct social injustice
- 3- To re-circulate the wealth of the community and create jobs and stimulate the economy. This will fight unemployment and create new jobs, therefore safeguarding self-dignity by providing work,

and not creating a group of people who are idle, wasting their time or pursuing bad habits

- 4- To help institutions that provide valuable service to the community, whereby these institutions can survive financially
- 5- To liberate our souls of greed
- 6- To avoid jealousy and hatred between poor and rich
- 7- To please God and get His reward by obeying His orders and by being of service and help to those among His creatures who need help

To help the poor and needy

When we help those who are poor or needy, it is not enough to give just a little, or to give only one time. The concept of helping should be such as to give enough and frequently, to enrich so that the individual can stand on his feet and become self-sufficient, and hopefully later on, he himself can give in charity. This concept was emphasized by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he said:

(The needy is the person whom one or two meals is not sufficient for him, but is the person who does not find a wealthy person who understands his plight and gives him enough to enrich him)

Malik, Ahmad, Bokhari & Muslim

It is our obligation to help the poor and needy, for they are our brothers and sisters who are going through hard time. What we have was given to us by God, and He can take it away, then we become as poor and needy as those whom we may hesitate in helping.

A poor person or a needy person who is related to us is more deserving of our charity, for we then fulfill our obligation to be good to our relations as well as helping a needy person. The Qur'an states that our relatives have a right in our money. In other words it is not left to our good nature, rather it is made obligatory on us to help our relations:

﴿ أُولَئِكَ يَرْوُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾

See they not that Allah enlarges the provision and restricts it, to whomsoever He pleases? Verily in that are Signs for those who believe.

Ar-Rum 30 : 37

﴿ فَآتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ
 اللَّهِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴾

So give what is due to kindred, the needy, and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the Countenance, of Allah, and it is they who will prosper.

Ar-Rum 30 : 38

The Qur'an also warns us against over- indulging and overspending, and not giving to and helping our relations and those who need our help

﴿ وَآتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَلَا تُبَذِّرْ تَبْذِيرًا ﴾

And render to the kindred their due rights, as (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer: but squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift.

Al-Isra'a 17 : 26

Striving to establish social justice

It is the duty of Muslims to establish social justice and work to eliminate poverty and want. Such a responsibility is inherent in allowing Muslims to establish their authority. In other words, if they do not shoulder that responsibility, then God may not guide them or allow them authority in the land:

﴿ الَّذِينَ إِن مَكَّنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا
 عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴾

(They are) those who, if We establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with Allah rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs.

Al-Hajj 22 : 41

Each society is made up of districts, and each district consists of many families. One way of establishing this social justice is to care

for our neighbors, and be good to them and fulfill their needs. If each district performs this duty, there will be no needy families. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stressed this concept of being good to the neighbor in several sayings:

(The Angel Gabriel kept advising me to be good to my neighbor till I thought that he will make him one of my heirs)

Bokhari & Muslim

(No one who believes in God and in the Last day, can sleep with a full stomach, if his neighbor is hungry)

To re-circulate the money and create jobs and stimulate the economy

When Zakat money is taken from the rich and is invested in projects that benefit the poor and allows the creation of new jobs, this wealth in the community is not hoarded, rather it is re-circulated. When new jobs are created, people spend their money and the economy grows. If the rich hoard their money, the economy becomes stagnant and unemployment rises. New jobs means more prosperity and increased productivity.

New jobs ensure self-dignity and becoming self-sufficient, rather than begging or being dependant on the generosity of others. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized this concept when he said :

(It is better for a healthy person to go and cut wood, carry it on his back, and sell it, rather than sit idle and not work. This way he helps himself and his family, and becomes self-sufficient, and can give in charity. For the upper hand that gives is better than the lower hand that receives, and start by supporting those whom you are responsible for)

Bokhari & Muslim

Lack of work leads to idle time that can be used in unhealthy ways, and may lead to bad habits. Work provides self-dignity and teaches work ethics and not become dependant on others.

Helping institutions that provide helpful service to the community

Schools that teach and spread useful knowledge may have financial problems and difficulty in running unless its budget is supported and supplemented. Clinics that care for the poor also may need financial help. Homes that take care of orphans or provide shelter for needy persons and

homes that care for the elderly may also need help. These are activities that help segments within the community. Such projects and institutions can be helped from Zakat money.

To liberate our souls of greed

It is human nature that we want to keep what we have earned. Few people are willing to share their livelihood with others. The Qur'an describes human nature and inclination, then stresses that faith in God and understanding our accountability to Him allows us to overcome this greed in our souls:

﴿ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا ﴾

Truly man was created very impatient;
Al-Ma'arej 70 : 19

﴿ إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا ﴾

Fretful when evil touches him;
Al-Ma'arej 70 : 20

﴿ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا ﴾

And niggardly when good reaches him;
Al-Ma'arej 70 : 21

﴿ إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴾

Not so those devoted to Prayer,
Al-Ma'arej 70 : 22

﴿ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ ﴾

Those who remain steadfast to their prayer;
Al-Ma'arej 70 : 23

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْلُومٌ ﴾

And those in whose wealth is a recognized right
Al-Ma'arej 70 : 24

﴿ لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَخْرُومِ ﴾

For the (needy) who asks and him who is prevented (for some reason from asking);

Al-Ma'arej 70 : 25

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بَيِّمِ الدِّينِ ﴾

And those who hold to the truth of the Day of Judgment;

Al-Ma'arej 70 : 26

The Qur'an states that those who give in charity liberate their souls of greed, and are promised success and God's reward:

﴿ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ وَأَسْمِعُوا وَأَطِيعُوا وَأَنْفِقُوا خَيْرًا لِّأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَمَنْ يُوقِ

شَحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴾

So fear Allah as much as ye can; listen and obey; and spend in charity for the benefit of your own souls. And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls; they are the ones that achieve prosperity.

At-Taghabun 64 : 16

The Qur'an praises the early Muslims who resided in Madina, and helped their brothers who sought refuge in their city:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ تَبَوَّءُوا الدَّارَ وَالْإِيمَانَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ يُحِبُّونَ مَنْ هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ فِي

صُدُورِهِمْ حَاجَةً مِّمَّا أُوتُوا وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ وَمَنْ

يُوقِ شَحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴾

But those who, before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the Faith, show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls; they are the ones that achieve prosperity.

Al-Hashr 59 : 9

To avoid jealousy and hatred in the community if there is strong Disparity between rich and poor

Jealousy with the meaning that you feel so envious of a rich person that you wish that his wealth is taken away from him is forbidden in Islam. God is the one who provides, if we are envious then we are questioning God's judgment and wisdom in allowing that person to become rich. Rather as Muslims, we should pray to God to guide him and let him understand his responsibility in spending his money wisely and in helping those who need his help. We are allowed to wish for ourselves the same blessing of money, if we are going to use it properly. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(You are allowed to wish for yourself two blessings: A person whom Allah blessed with knowledge and wisdom, and he is using it and teaching it to others; and money that Allah bestowed on a person and he is spending it properly)

Bokhari & Muslim

When the poor and needy see the rich in their community spending their wealth properly and helping others and reaching out to the poor and needy, there is no need for them to be jealous or envious. Rather they will praise their effort and pray to God on their behalf.

To obey God and seek His pleasure and His reward

Allah wishes that we obey His orders. When we fulfill our obligations of safeguarding our prayers, fasting, giving in charity, being good and kind to our relations, doing our work to the best of our ability, then Allah is pleased with us. When we hasten in doing good and are foremost and offer optional service, we become close to God and beloved to Him. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(There is nothing that I love more than My servant obeying My orders and fulfilling what I made obligatory on him. My servant keeps coming close to Me with optional service till I love him. When I love him, I become the hearing that he hears with, and his sight that he sees with, and his hand that he uses, and his leg that he walks with)

Bokhari & Muslim

When we give in charity and help Allah's servants, we are promised forgiveness of sin and Allah's reward:

﴿ إِن تَقْرَضُوا آلَ اللَّهِ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا يُّضْعِفَهُ لَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ شَكُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴾

If ye loan to Allah a beautiful loan, He will double it to your (credit), and He will grant you Forgiveness: for Allah is Most Ready to appreciate (service), Most Forbearing,

At-Taghabun 64 : 17

Satan tells us that giving in charity decreases our money, and if we keep on giving, we will become poor. In contrast, God promises to replace anything that we give in charity, and promises forgiveness of our sins:

﴿ الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُم مَّغْفِرَةً مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلًا ۚ

وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴾

The Evil One threatens you with poverty and bids you to conduct unseemly. Allah promised you His forgiveness and bounties. And Allah cares for all and He knows all things.

Al-Baqara 2 : 268

﴿ قُلْ إِن رَّبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ ۚ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

فَهُوَ يَخْلِفُهُ ۚ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴾

Say: "Verily my Lord enlarges and restricts the Sustenance to such of His servants as He pleases: and nothing do ye spend in the least (in His Cause) but He replaces it: for He is the Best of those who grant Sustenance.

SA'Ba 34 : 39

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (Charity never decreases your wealth) Muslim

Ethics and manner of giving charity

- 1- Not hurting the feelings of the person receiving our charity
- 2- Charity should be done in secret and only publicly in certain situations
- 3- We should give the best of what we have

- 4- Each should give what he is capable of. God rewards us according to our sincerity and effort
- 5- We should not delay our charity, but give in charity as soon as we can

Do not harm those receiving your charity

When we give in charity we obey God and acknowledge His blessings. The goal is to help those who are needy or poor. The last thing we wish is to harm them or hurt their feelings. We should give charity in such a way that those receiving our charity feel good, and not slighted in the least. If we look down on them, or show them that they depend on our generosity or remind them of our favor, then we have cancelled our good deed and we get no reward:

﴿ قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذًى ۖ وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٌ ﴾

Kind words and the covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury. Allah is Free of all wants, and He is Most Forbearing.

Al-Baqara 2 : 263

﴿ يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَبْطُلُوا صَدَقَتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَىٰ كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۖ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا ۖ لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ

الْكَافِرِينَ ﴾

O ye who believe! Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury, like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in Allah nor in the Last Day. They are in Parable like a hard barren rock, on which is a little soil; on it falls heavy rain, which leaves it (just) a bare stone. They will be able to do nothing with aught they have earned. And Allah guides not those who reject Faith.

Al-Baqara 2 : 264

Charity should be done in secret

In most cases charity is to be given secretly. The goal is to help those poor and needy and to seek God's pleasure. The goal is not personal praise or identification as a good Samaritan.

There are situations where giving charity in public is allowed: to set an example and encourage others to follow suit, or to explain how worthy a particular cause or institution is.

The Qur'an explains:

﴿إِنْ تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَيُكَفِّرُ عَنْكُمْ مِنْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ۝﴾

If ye disclose (acts of) charity, even so it is well, but if ye conceal them, and make them reach those (really) in need, that is best for you: it will remove from you some of your (stains of) evil. And Allah is well acquainted with what ye do.

Al-Baqara 2 : 271

We should give the best of what we have

And not chose the things that we do not want, or to give them as charity to get rid of these items, for we ourselves would not accept them if they are offered to us:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّا أَخْرَجْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا تَيَمَّمُوا الْخَبِيثَ مِنْهُ تُنْفِقُونَ وَلَسْتُمْ بِآخِذِيهِ إِلَّا أَنْ تُغْمِضُوا فِيهِ ۚ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ ۝﴾

O ye who believe! Give of the good things which ye have (honorably) earned, and of the fruits of the earth which We have produced for you, and do not even aim at getting anything which is bad, in order that out of it ye may give away something, when ye

yourselves would not receive it except with closed eyes. And know that Allah is free of all wants, and worthy of all praise.

Al-Baqara 2 : 267

Each person should give in charity what he can afford to give

The reward depends on our sincerity and how difficult it is to give in charity. Sometimes a small amount of money given by a poor person is better and more beloved to Allah than a large charity given by a rich person. Only God knows what is in our hearts and whether we can afford to give in charity or not, and how much we are capable of giving. Our willingness to give and what motivates our action determines our reward and whether our charity is accepted or not. Our manners of giving charity is another consideration.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that a Dirham (small change) sometimes beats a Dinar (more money) because who gave the small charity was poor and it meant a lot to him, whereas the person who gave the large amount of money was rich, and his contribution hardly affected his wealth (Bokhari).

We should not delay our charity

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was asked: What is the best charity? He said: (To give in charity when you are healthy, and careful and fearful that giving may decrease your money; and not delay your charity, till you are about to die, then say: "This belongs to this person, and this belongs to this person" because it is already theirs) Bokhari

We do not know when we are going to die. If we die before we do good and help others, then we have deprived our souls of the benefit of charity.

As discussed earlier the value and reward of charity depends on :

- How sincere we are and what is our motivation
- How difficult it is for us to give
- How much help and benefit our charity will cause. The Qur'an explains that giving when our help will truly make a big

difference is more valuable than giving when everyone else is doing so:

﴿ وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَّا تُنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاثُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ لَا يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَنْفَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَتَّلَ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ بَعْدُ وَقَتَّلُوا ۚ وَكُلًّا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ۝ ﴾

And what cause have ye why ye should not spend in the cause of Allah? For to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth. Not equal among you are those who spent (freely) and fought, before the Victory, (with those who did so later). Those are higher in rank than those who spent (freely) and fought afterwards. But to all has Allah promised a goodly (reward). And Allah is well acquainted with all that ye do.

Al-Hadeed 57 : 10

Optional charity

Zakat or obligatory charity is 2.5 % of our income, and must be given by those whose income reach a certain threshold. There is more to charity than this obligatory amount. Muslims are encouraged to give more in charity if they can afford it, and are promised a great reward. There is no set limit for how much you can give. Each person is left to his own generosity and convictions.

We are told that giving in charity does not decrease our wealth, because God promised to replace what we gave and He will provide for us and give us more.

We are also told that charity forgives our sins, increases our good deeds and amplifies our reward.

The Prophet (PBUH) was exemplary in giving and one of his companions said: He was more generous than the blowing wind or the wind that brings rain, and was most generous during the month of Ramadan (the month of fasting) Bokhari & Muslim. The prophet's

companions also set for us the best example in giving charity and not holding on to the material things in life. Rather they preferred God's pleasure, and were foremost in hastening in all good deeds.

Charity is more than giving money

(not everyone has money to give, but every person can avail himself of the benefit and reward of charity.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (Every Muslim should give charity every day) He was asked: Suppose he does not have money to give? He said: (he works with his hands to earn a living and become self-sufficient, and gives charity). He was asked: Suppose he cannot work? He said: (He helps the person in dire need of his Help). He was asked: suppose he does not do that? He said: (He guides to what is right and forbids what is wrong). He was asked: Suppose he does not do that? He said: (Then he does not harm others, and it will be considered a charity for him) narrated by Ahmad, Bokhari & Muslim

In this saying, Prophet Muhammad enlarges the concept of charity to include, in addition to money, the effort that we exert to help those who need our help, and the guidance and advice we give to others and not harming others in word or deed.)

Fasting

We will discuss the following concepts:

- 1- The obligation to fast
- 2- How do Muslims fast
- 3- The rationale and wisdom of the fast
- 4- Optional fasting

The obligation to fast the month of Ramadan

Muslims are obligated to fast the month of Ramadan, which is the 9th month in the Lunar calendar. This came as an order from God:

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ﴾

O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint,

Al-Baqara 2 : 183

This verse explains that the order to fast was given to previous generations before Islam. In other words, fasting is not something new invented by Muslims. It is a confirmation of God's order that existed before.

The verse also summarizes the wisdom and goal of fasting: "To learn Taqwa" to realize and understand and achieve piety, righteousness and goodness. Therefore fasting is not without a goal. Its primary goal and its fruit is this feeling of piety and God-consciousness .

Taqwa involves important concepts:

- To guard against evil and wrong-doing
- To avoid what God has forbidden, and not do anything that might displease Him.
- To Watch our behavior because we understand that God is well aware of what we say and what we do
- To realize how much we are indebted to God, therefore we try to be proactive and helping those who need our help.

How do Muslims fast?

Fasting is abstaining from any food or drink or intimate sexual contact from dawn till sunset. After the sun sets, Muslims are allowed to eat and drink This fast is done every consecutive day for 29-30 days each Ramadan.

Abstaining is the passive part of the fast. What is more important is to abstain from doing what is wrong, and not engage in vulgar speech or lying. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (If your fast does not

forbid you from lying or giving false witness then there is no need for you to leave your food and drink) Bokhari & Muslim.

The rationale and wisdom of the fast

Some may think that fasting and not eating for several hours every day for a whole month is too harsh and does not make sense. But God is wise in His orders. The following may give some insight into the wisdom of the fast:

- 1- Fasting teaches us self-discipline and control, and a sense of accomplishment.
- 2- Fasting stresses obedience to God and putting our priorities in perspective
- 3- When we control our desire for food and learn patience and sacrifice, we elevate ourselves spiritually and feel closer to God
- 4- When Muslims fast together they develop a sense of identity and unity, whether at the family level, or community level, or globally
- 5- Ramadan is a holy month of worship, when Muslims pray more and recite the Qur'an often, and go to the mosque frequently
- 6- There is a great reward for fasting the month of Ramadan.

Fasting teaches discipline, self-control and achievement

We must learn how to control our vain desires and learn discipline. Fasting is one method of achieving self-control. We learn to control our hunger and thirst and deal with headache and fatigue. After few days of fasting, these symptoms subside and we get used to the new routine of fasting. We no longer feel hungry or thirsty, and we feel good that we are able to obey God and His orders.

Fasting teaches obedience to God and understanding our priorities

Muslims fast because they were ordered by God to fast. They know that there is a reason and wisdom for God's order. What God

commands is good for us, and is done for our benefit. Sometimes we understand the rationale and wisdom underlying a Divine order, and sometimes it is difficult for us to comprehend such an order. Not understanding does not mean that we disobey God's order. We should obey, and at the same time try to understand and reflect on such orders.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explains in the following Hadeeth some benefits of fasting:

(The fasting person has two joys: one joy when he breaks his fast; and the other joy when he meets his Lord) Bokhari & Muslim

We learn from the prophet's saying:

- When we break our fast, and are able to eat and drink, we realize God's blessing and look at food and drink from a different prospective. Having no access to food and drink, we can appreciate the plight of the poor and needy, and understand our obligation to help them.
- We understand that God provides for us and bestows His grace in different ways. Our duty is to acknowledge God's blessings by being helpful to others
- Whatever reward we get for our fast in this life pales in comparison to God's reward in the Hereafter

Controlling our vain desires and lifting our souls spiritually

When we fast and learn to cope with our hunger and thirst, we also learn to control our vain desires and avoid what is wrong and shameful. We become masters of ourselves, rather than slaves to our desires. The Qur'an explains that some people worship their desires:

﴿ أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ ۚ هُوَ أَفْأَنَّتْ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا ۚ ﴾

Seest thou such a one as taketh for his god his own passion (or impulse)? Couldst thou be a disposer of affairs for him?

Al-Furqan 25 : 43

If we choose to follow our vain desires, we distance ourselves from God and deprive ourselves from His guidance:

﴿ أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ أَخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوْنَهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ
عَلَىٰ بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴾

Then seest thou such a one as takes as his god his own vain desire? Allah has, knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart (and understanding), and put a cover on his sight: Who, then, will guide him after Allah (has withdrawn guidance)? Will ye not then receive admonition?

Al-Jatheya 45 : 23

Contrast a person who indulges in alcohol or drugs, or who engages in adultery: his whole energy is consumed by fulfilling these desires. He is not able to see or achieve anything else. Contrast that with another person who avoids bad habits and understands his duty in helping others and being an important useful member of his community. He reaches out and is foremost in doing good and setting a good example for others to follow in his character and behavior.

Muslim identity during Ramadan

Muslims in the same community fast together and break their fast together, whether this is done at the family level or community level. When people share in an activity, they develop a bond and a certain identity. This feeling of belonging to a community and sharing in its values and traditions is peculiar to Ramadan, the month of fasting. During Ramadan Muslims come to the mosque to pray together and break their fast together.

The family eat at sunset, after performing the sunset prayer. They are grateful to God for His blessings. They eat, talk and are happy. This family union and sharing is felt by every Muslim family during the month of Ramadan. Sometimes families visit one another, and break their fast in a different home. Again this reinforces the sense of belonging and identity.

Muslims know that other Muslims in this country are also observing Ramadan, and feel they belong to a larger community. The same

feeling is present across the globe, because Muslims in every corner of this earth also observe the month of Ramadan, fast, pray and thank God for His blessings.

Ramadan is a month of worship

During this blessed month, Muslims pray more often, especially in congregation and go to the mosque for night prayer and for recitation of the Qur'an.

Prayer to God, called Dua'a is common after the daily prayers and after the night prayer. God listens to our prayers, He hears and responds to them as He sees fit.

It is customary to recite the whole Qur'an during optional night prayers in the mosque during Ramadan, called Taraweeh prayers. An Imam who knows and has memorized the Qur'an leads the prayers and recites the Qur'an loud.

Charity is also encouraged in Ramadan. We referred to Prophet Muhammad's generosity during Ramadan. Giving to the poor and needy is stressed in the month of fasting. There is also a special charity to be given during Ramadan to atone for our mistakes and imperfection during this month of fasting. It is given before the month is over, in order to allow the poor and needy celebrate and enjoy the Eid (feast) after Ramadan is over.

The great reward for fasting Ramadan

Allah promised a great reward for fasting Ramadan. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us :

(Whoever fasts Ramadan with full conviction, seeking his reward from God alone, his sins will be forgiven, whatever he has committed before) Bokhari & Muslim.

The Prophet (PBUH) also said:

(Ramadan is a great month: its first ten days is forgiveness of sin; its second ten days is mercy from God; and the last ten days is liberation from Hell Fire)Tabarani.

Good deeds are rewarded many times over up to 700 times or more during this blessed month of fasting. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said after his Lord:

(Fasting is done for Me (God) and I give its reward. The smell of the mouth of a fasting person is more beloved to Me than musk. He leaves his food, drink and desire for My sake. The fasting person has two joys: once when he breaks his fast, and the second when he meets his Lord) Bokhari & Muslim

Optional fasting

Optional fasting can be done at any time of the year excluding the days of the Eid (feast) and is rewarded by God. Muslims may opt to fast the following days:

- 1- The first 9 days of the month of Zul-Hijja, or especially the 9th day of Zul-Hijja when the pilgrims are praying to God in the valley of Arafat. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us the great value of these days and nights
- 2- 6 days in the month of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that fasting Ramadan, followed by fasting 6 days in Shawwal equals fasting your whole life because a good deed is rewarded ten times, so one month equals fasting ten months and 6 days equals fasting two additional months.
- 3- Fasting the day of Ashura (which is the 10th day of Muharram) and a day before or a day after that.
- 4- Fasting 3 days of each month equals fasting the whole month
- 5- The best fast is that of prophet Dawood (David). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(The best fast most beloved to Allah is the fast of Dawood (David): he used to fast one day, then breaks his fast the next day; and the best prayer most beloved to Allah is the prayer of Dawood: he used to stand up in prayer one third of the night, and sleep half the night, and remember Allah one sixth of the night) Bokhari

If we missed one or more days in the month of Ramadan, then we are supposed to make it up. We can fast any day. Aesha, the prophet's wife used to make up for the days she lost because of

sickness or having menstruated during Ramadan, in the month of Sha'ban, the month immediately preceding Ramadan.

Hajj (Pilgrimage)

We will discuss the following concepts:

- 1- The obligation to perform Hajj once in a life time
- 2- How do Muslims perform Hajj
- 3- The rationale and wisdom of Hajj
- 4- The great reward of Hajj
- 5-

The obligation to perform Hajj

Muslims are obligated to do Hajj once in a life time, if they have the money to undertake that journey and they are not ill or infirm. The Qur'an states:

﴿ إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

The first House (of worship) appointed for men was that at Bakka; full of blessing and of guidance for all kinds of beings:

Al-Imran 3 : 96

﴿ فِيهِ ءَايَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ مَّقَامُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَنْ دَخَلَهُ كَانَ ءَامِنًا وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ

الْبَيْتِ مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾

In it are Signs manifest; (for example), the Station of Abraham; whoever enters it attains security; pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to Allah, those who can afford the journey; but if any deny faith, Allah stands not in need of any of His creatures.

Al-Imran 3 : 97

Also :

﴿ وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ

وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴾

Behold! We gave the site, to Abraham, of the (Sacred) House, (saying): "Associate not anything (in worship) with Me; and sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).

Al-Hijj 22 : 26

﴿وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَى كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ

عَمِيقٍ﴾

"And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men; they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways;

Al-Hijj 22 : 27

This obligation to perform Hajj is only once in a person's lifetime. Some Muslims perform Hajj several times because they believe that Hajj wipes out their sin. Unfortunately this results in millions of pilgrims coming to the holy places and results in overcrowding, and on occasion accidents. Muslims should be considerate and once they have performed the obligation of Hajj give others the same opportunity. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stressed this point. One day he said: (O people Hajj has been ordained on you). A man asked : Every year O messenger of God? The prophet kept quiet, and the man kept asking the same question. After the third time, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (If I said yes, it would have become obligatory on you to do Hajj every year, and you cannot afford to do that. If I ask you to do something, try to do it to the best of your ability; and when I forbid something, avoid it. Those before you perished because they argued and differed with their prophets) Bokhari.

If a person's father or mother died and were unable to perform Hajj, then it is the obligation of that person to perform Hajj on their behalf, after he has done Hajj for himself.

Hajj is a difficult and strenuous journey and those who are old or infirm or with disability will not be able to perform Hajj. Therefore, it is recommended to do Hajj as soon as a person is capable to undertake this journey, and not delay it.

A Muslim should not do Hajj if he has debts to pay. These debts take precedence. Also if a person is taking care of his elderly parents and cannot leave them, he should delay his Hajj. A person cannot go for Hajj if he does not have the money to provide for his family when he is away.

How do Muslims perform Hajj?

There are several cornerstones in Hajj. These are essential elements in this pilgrimage, and include the following:

- 1- The intention to perform Hajj seeking God's pleasure
- 2- Wearing Ihram (Consecration) clothes
- 3- Tawaff (circumambulation) the Ka'Ba (the sacred house in Macca) built by Prophets Abraham and Ishma'il
- 4- Standing in the valley of Arafat on the 9th day of Zul-Hijja

We will briefly describe the proper manner of performing Hajj:

- A pilgrim takes a shower to clean himself/ herself, then puts on Ihram clothes, which are white and unswewn. He says the intention to perform Hajj
- The Pilgrim goes to Macca (a holy city in Saudi Arabia) and visits the Ka'Ba . He circumambulate or walks around the Ka Ba seven times, praying to God and seeking His forgiveness. This process is called Tawaf.
- Then the pilgrim walks between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times retracing the steps of Hajir, the wife of Prophet Abraham and the mother of prophet Isma'il, as she walked these two hills searching for water for herself and her infant son.
- Then on the 9th day of Zul-Hijja, the pilgrim stands in the valley of Arafat praying to God and seeking His forgiveness. Hajj does not occur unless this essential cornerstone is fulfilled.
- Then the pilgrim goes to Mena to do symbolic stoning of the devil, offer sacrifice, and cut his hair. The pilgrim stays in Mena three days repeating this process of symbolic stoning of the devil and praying to God and making a pledge with him that he will live his life as God wishes him to do.

The Qur'an explains these rites:

For example the walking around the Ka'Ba is paying homage to prophets Abraham and Ishma'il:

﴿وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ﴾

And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: for Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.

Al-Baqara 2 : 127

﴿رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

"Our Lord! Make of us Muslims bowing to Thy (Will); and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Thy (Will); and show us our places for the celebration of (due) rites; and turn unto us (in Mercy); for Thou art the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

Al-Baqara 2 : 128

Walking between the hills of Safa and Marwa

﴿إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ ۖ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا ۚ وَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

Behold! Safa and Marwa are among the Symbols of Allah. So if those who visit the House in the Season or at other times, should compass them round, it is no sin in them. And if any one obeyeth his own impulse to Good, be sure that Allah is He Who recogniseth and knoweth.

Al-Baqara 2 : 158

Offering sacrifice in Mena

The Qur'an explains that it is not the meat or blood of the sacrificed animal that is important, but the obedience and devotion to God that truly counts:

﴿لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْكُمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ سَخَّرَهَا لَكُمْ لِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَيْكُمْ ۚ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for His guidance to you: and proclaim the Good News to all who do right.

Al-Hajj 22 : 37

Standing in Arafat

Prophet Muhammad emphasized that this aspect or Rite of Hajj is the most important cornerstone when he said :
(Hajj is Arafat) Bokhari.

The best Du'a (prayer to God) on the day of Arafat is the prayer of all the prophets, as outlined by prophet Muhammad (PBUH):
(There is no god but Allah, He is alone with no partners; all praise and thanks is due to Him; He gives life and He takes life away; and He has power over all things)

The rationale and wisdom of Hajj

- 1- Hajj is a journey of purification when a person leaves his preoccupation with worldly affairs and journeys to God, his Creator and Sustainer, making a pledge with God
- 2- Muslims from all over the world gather for this important event where they have a chance to discuss their mutual affairs and work together and cooperate
- 3- Visiting these holy sites brings to life Prophets Abraham, Ishma'il and Muhammad (PBUH) and their example of

obedience, devotion and sacrifice. Hajj also honors Hajir the wife of prophet Abraham and the mother of prophet Ishma'il

- 4- Hajj is a beginning, not an end, when we make a pledge to God to be good and to live our life as He commanded
- 5- Standing in Arafat praying to God and seeking His forgiveness reminds us of our accountability to Him and of the day of resurrection and judgment
- 6- The reward of Hajj is tremendous: Forgiveness of sin and a new beginning and clean slate

Hajj is a journey of purification and making a pledge with God

In the hustle and bustle of daily life it is easy to forget what it is really all about and what our priorities are. Some get absorbed with and indulge themselves in the material aspects of this worldly life and forget their accountability to God.

At the end what matters is what we have done all our life. Did we behave in a righteous way, helped those who needed our help, were good to our families, and did we set a good example for others to follow ? Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us :

(When a person dies three things go with him to his grave, two things come back and one thing stays with him: his family, money and his deeds follow him; his family and money come back, and the only thing that stays with him is his deeds) Bokhari

The Prophet (PBUH) also said:

(Every person on the Day of Judgment will be asked to account for four things : his whole life, what did he do with it; his youth, did he use it properly or abuse it; his money: how did he earn it, and how did he spend it; and his knowledge: what did he do with it) Termedhi.

In Hajj we have an opportunity to reflect on our life and what we wish to accomplish, and we have a chance to set our priorities correctly. When we stand up in Arafat praying to God and seeking His forgiveness, we make a pledge with God to obey His orders and to live our lives as He commanded. Therefore, Hajj should be considered the beginning of a new page and not an end. Some Muslims delay performing Hajj till they are old and about to die,

thinking that Hajj atones for their sins. This is a wrong concept, for Hajj is a beginning and a realization that we have a tremendous responsibility and a lot of work to do. Such fresh outlook and new vigor is generated by proper understanding of the wisdom of Hajj. It is not the visitation to religious ancient sites or following certain rituals but it is the feeling that fills our heart and overwhelms our whole being of how much we are indebted to God and a desire to serve God and acknowledge His blessings. This feeling is the driving force that allows us to change our behavior and set up our priorities correctly. The Qur'an states:

﴿ أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَهُوَ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ
وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَمًا
وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعٌ
الْفُورُ ۝﴾

Know ye (all), that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting and multiplying, (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children. Here is a similitude; how rain and the growth which it brings forth, delight (the hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away. But in the Hereafter is a Penalty severe (for the devotees of wrong). And Forgiveness from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure (for the devotees of Allah). And what is the life of this world, but goods and chattels of deception?

Al-Hadeed 57 : 20

And :

﴿ يٰٓأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْفُورُ ۝﴾

O men! certainly the promise of Allah is true. Let not then this present life deceive you, nor let the Chief Deceiver deceive you about Allah.

Fatir 35 : 5

﴿ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمُ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُوا حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ

السَّعِيرِ ﴾

Verily Satan is an enemy to you: so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his adherents, that they may become companions of the Blazing Fire.

Fatir 35 : 6

﴿ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ

كَبِيرٌ ﴾

For those who reject Allah, is a terrible Penalty: but for those who believe and work righteous deeds, is Forgiveness, and a magnificent Reward.

Fatir 35 : 7

There is nothing wrong in enjoying the good things in life that are lawful in moderation:

﴿ قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ قُلْ هِيَ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا فِي

الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا خَالِصَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ ۚ كَذَلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴾

Say: Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah, which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance? Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgment. Thus do We explain the Signs in detail for those who understand.

Al-Ara'f 7 : 32

Islam is a religion of moderation, avoiding excess :

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا ﴾

Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes);

Al-Furqan 25 : 67

Hajj is an annual gathering of Muslims from all over the world

If such an event is used properly it can solve many problems. Leaders can discuss common concerns, and scholars can study and formulate opinions regarding important issues facing Muslims today. In an atmosphere of piety and kindness, reaching out and working together and cooperation is possible.

It is sad that Muslims do not avail themselves of this opportunity, and get completely absorbed with the rituals of Hajj. There is nothing wrong in conducting business that will be beneficial to Muslims and addressing and solving problems during Hajj. The Qur'an addresses one aspect of business:

﴿لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ ۚ فَإِذَا أَفَضْتُمْ مِّنْ عَرَفَاتٍ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عِندَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ ۖ وَاذْكُرُوهُ كَمَا هَدَانَكُمْ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِّن قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الضَّالِّينَ ٢١٧﴾

It is no crime in you if ye seek of the bounty of your Lord (during pilgrimage). Then when ye pour down from (Mount) Arafat, celebrate the praises of Allah at the Sacred Monument, and celebrate His praises as He has directed you, even though, before this, ye went astray.

Al-Baqara 2 : 198

If seeking sustenance and the bounty of God is allowed in Hajj, then it stands to reason that addressing important issues and making life easier for Muslims and solving their problems is also allowed and encouraged.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that improving the relationship between Muslims and solving their problems is better rewarded than prayer, fasting or charity:

(Shall I tell you what is better rewarded than prayer, fasting and charity ?). His companions said: Yes, O messenger of Allah. He said: (Improving your affairs, for if you have problems and disputes among yourselves this will wipe you out, it will wipe out your religion)

Termedhi.

The Prophet (PBUH) emphasized that Muslims should stay close and help one another:

(Do not be envious of each other; do not distance yourselves from each other and do not dislike each other. A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim. Whoever is helping his brother, Allah will help him) Muslim.

During Hajj Muslims visit holy places and remember God's prophets

When Muslims circle around the Ka Ba, the holy shrine in Macca, they remember and pay homage to Prophets Abraham and Ishma'il, who built the Ka Ba in sincere service to God. They prayed to God to accept their effort and prayed that God may send a messenger to the Arabs in Macca from among themselves. God responded and sent prophet Muhammad (PBUH) a descendant of prophets Abraham and Ishma'il.

﴿ رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴾

"Our Lord! Send amongst them a Messenger of their own, who shall rehearse Thy Signs to them and instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, and sanctify them: for Thou art the Exalted in Might, the Wise."

Al-Baqara 2 : 129

And :

﴿ لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴾

Allah did confer a great favor on the Believers when He sent among them a Messenger from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the Signs of Allah, sanctifying them, and instructing them in Scripture and Wisdom, while before that, they had been in manifest error.

Al-Imran 3 : 164

As we walk between the hills of Safa and Marwa, we remember Hajir the wife of prophet Abraham and the mother of prophet Ishma'il. We pay homage to her as we retrace her steps searching for water when Macca was a desolate place, a desert with no water. Then through the mercy of God the spring of Zamzam erupted, and life flourished and Macca became a safe haven. Yet despite God's blessings the people of Macca rejected God's messenger, and were therefore punished:

﴿ وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ ءَامِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِّن كُلِّ مَكَانٍ فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿١٦٤﴾ ﴾

Allah sets forth a Parable: a city enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: yet was it ungrateful for the favors of Allah: so Allah made it taste of hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of the (evil) which (its people) wrought.

An-Nahl 16 : 112

﴿ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾ ﴾

And there came to them a Messenger from among themselves, but they falsely rejected him; so the Wrath seized them even in the midst of their iniquities.

An-Nahl 16 : 113

﴿ وَقَالُوا إِن نَّتَّبِعِ الْهُدَى مَعَكَ نُتَخَطَّفَ مِنْ أَرْضِنَا أَوَلَمْ نُمَكِّنْ لَهُمْ حَرَمًا ءَامِنًا يُحِيطُ إِلَيْهِ شَرَاتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ رِّزْقًا مِّن لَّدُنَّا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١١٤﴾ ﴾

They say: "If we were to follow the guidance with thee, we should be snatched away from our land." Have We not established for them a

secure sanctuary, to which are brought as tribute fruits of all kinds, a provision from Ourselves? But most of them understand not.

Al-Qasas 28 : 57

As we remember the stories of these great prophets we begin to understand their mission and how they invited to God with patient perseverance and determination. We learn from their sacrifice and struggle and we understand that what is important is establishing the truth and guiding others so that they too can see the truth and want to serve God. The Qur'an relates to us the stories of many prophets in order that we may learn from their example:

﴿لَقَدْ كُنَّا فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةً لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۚ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَٰكِن تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾

There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it, a detailed exposition of all things, and a Guide and a Mercy to any such as believe.

Yusuf 12 : 111

﴿وَكُلًّا نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نَحْنُ بِمُتَّبِعِيهِ ۚ فَؤَادَكَ ۚ وَجَاءَكَ فِي هَذِهِ الْحَقُّ ۚ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

All that We relate to thee of the stories of the Messengers, with it We make firm thy heart: in them there cometh to thee the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe.

Hud 11 : 120

Hajj is a beginning and a new chapter in our life, and a pledge with God

Some people delay Hajj till they are old and about to die. Then they go for Hajj to wipe out their sins. This is not what Hajj is all about. Hajj is meant to be a new beginning and a new chapter in our life. We make a pledge with God that from this moment on we will obey God and live our life as He commanded with conviction and action.

God loves for us to turn to Him as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us:

(God is very happy when His servant turns to Him in repentance)
Bokhari.

The Qur'an states :

﴿ فَادْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونَ ۝ ﴾

Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me and reject not Faith.

Al-Baqara 2 : 152

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us :

(If My servant comes close to me I will come closer to him. If he comes to Me walking, I will come to him running)

Bokhari

This pledge and covenant with God is an expression of our realization of God's many blessings and an acknowledgment that He is Our sustainer and guardian:

﴿ وَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمِيثَاقَهُ الَّذِي وَاتَّفَقْتُمْ بِهِ إِذْ قُلْتُمْ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ۝ ﴾

And call in remembrance the favor of Allah unto you, and His covenant, which He ratified with you, when ye said: "We hear and we obey": and fear Allah, for Allah knoweth well the secrets of your hearts.

Al-Maeda 5 : 7

﴿ يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۚ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ
قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ ءَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۚ اَعْدِلُوا هُوَ اَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ ۝ ﴾

O ye who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

Al-Maeda 5 : 8

Standing in Arafat reminds us of the Day of Judgment and our Accountability to God

The Day of Judgment is a day when God will judge His servants and each person must account for his actions. It will be a hard day for the wicked and those who disobeyed God and followed their vain desires. Those who had faith, obeyed God and lived their life serving God will be rewarded for their patience and sacrifice:

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ آتِقُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَأَخْشَوْا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي وَالِدٌ عَنْ وَلَدِهِ وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ هُوَ جَازٍ عَنْ وَالِدِهِ شَيْئًا إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ﴾

O mankind! do your duty to your Lord, and fear (the coming of) a Day when no father can avail aught for his son, nor a son avail aught for his father. Verily, the promise of Allah is true: let not then this present life deceive you, nor let the Chief Deceiver deceive you about Allah.

Luqman 31 : 32

God's righteous servants will be safe :

﴿أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ﴾

Behold! verily on the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor shall they grieve;

Yunus 10 : 62

﴿الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ﴾

Those who believe and (constantly) guard against evil.

Yunus 10 : 63

﴿لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾

For them are Glad Tidings, in the life of the Present and in the Hereafter: no change can there be in the Words of Allah. This is indeed the supreme Felicity.

Yunus 10 : 64

In contrast, the wicked will be humiliated, and their excuses and remorse will not be accepted :

﴿وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فَتُحْتَأْتَبُوهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ﴾

The Unbelievers will be led to Hell in crowd: until, when they arrive there, its gates will be opened. And its Keepers will say, "Did not Messengers come to you from among yourselves, rehearsing to you the Signs of your Lord, and warning you of the Meeting of this Day of yours?" The answer will be: "True: but the Decree of Punishment has been proved true against the Unbelievers!"

Az-Zumar 39 : 71

﴿قِيلَ ادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ مَثْوًى لِّلْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ﴾

(To them) will be said: "Enter ye the gates of Hell, to dwell therein: and evil is (this) abode of the arrogant!"

Az-Zumar 39 : 72

The reward for Hajj is tremendous

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(Whoever performs Hajj and conducts himself in proper manner will return free of sin as on the day he was born)

Bokhari & Muslim.

The emphasis here is on proper manner for it indicates whether we have faith or not. Engaging in wrong conduct or in vulgar speech is not becoming of a pilgrim, someone who made this long journey seeking God's forgiveness and guidance. The Qur'an states:

﴿ الْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَةٌ ۖ فَمَنْ فَرَضَ فِيهِنَّ الْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ ۚ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمْهُ اللَّهُ ۚ وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَاتَّقُونِ يَا أُولِيَ الْأَلْبَابِ ﴾

For Hajj are the months well-known. If any one undertakes that duty therein, let there be no obscenity, nor wickedness, nor wrangling in the Hajj and whatever good ye do, (be sure) Allah knoweth it. And take a provision (with you) for the journey, but the best of provisions is right conduct. So fear Me, O ye that are wise!

Al-Baqara 2 : 197

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