



# The Spirit of *Saum* as a Moral and Spiritual Paradigm

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## Abstract

The word *soum* is an Arabic word characterized as deliberate abstinence from eating, drinking, and sexual experiences from dawn to dusk. In the post-modern world, going without eating and drinking anything for a certain period is either judged as an individual's *unfree* act or a superstitious practice by some typical materialistic people. Ramadan, the month of fasting is an inevitable part/pillar of Muslim tradition and belief. Thus given the growing misunderstandings, the practice of fasting in the month of Ramadan has been criticized/"banned"<sup>1</sup> in various parts of the world. In this context, the questions sharply emerge what is the philosophy of *soum*/fasting? Why Muslims undergoes such a hard trial? The paper attempts to pounder into these questions to counter the bizarre ideas, and misunderstandings concerning fasting and to explore the significance of fasting as a moral and spiritual paradigm. Though fasting is a voluntary and qualitatively different endeavor executed by a person for his/her spiritual and moral alimentation. The moral and spiritual implications of fasting reflect abnegation, chastity, frugality, temperance, prudence, and moderation. These are significant themes concerning *soum*/fasting which has attracted the attention of various philosophers' scholars and spiritual leaders. Having said that the paper attempts to inquire into the deeper meanings of the word *soum* concerning Muslim's practice of fasting in the month of Ramadan and extensively explore its moral, spiritual and social aspects.

## Keywords;

*Soum*, Self-discipline, God-consciousness, Empathy, Love, Harmony, Patience

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/6/18/china-bans-muslims-from-fasting-ramadan-in-xinjiang>

## Introduction

In a purely materialistic world, it is difficult to keep one's inner existence (spirituality) free from the phenomenon of desires and interests that more often becomes impediments in the process of purification of the soul. Traditionally fasting is known as '*Saum*' which means abstinence. The word *soum* and fasting are used synonymously in this work. Since the spirit of (fast) is the spirit of abstinence and self-control. As Wahidudin Khan puts it, "Abstaining from food and drink during the month of Ramadan is aimed to awaken the *soum spirit* of the believer"<sup>2</sup>. It shows that fasting imposes certain prescriptions and principles of action for self-discipline and self-surrendering to the will of God. This, however, makes *soum*/fasting a qualitatively different act that strives for inspiration, purification, and God-consciousness. The conscious and unforced fast keeps an individual in the right relationship with all. In this sense, fasting in the month of Ramadan is a stance of love, sympathy, goodwill, and kindness towards all living beings. During Ramadan an individual who fasts does not eat a grain of food or a drop of water from dawn to dusk, even how delicious the food is or how hungry or thirsty one feels. But it is important to mention that fasting is not only about avoiding food or drink rather it is a practice of self-discipline and self-control. In the deeper meanings, fasting becomes a period of meditation, self-restraint, repentance, and spiritual recuperation. In this period one of the important changes such as humans transcending and transforming endeavors emerges in which an individual starts readjustments of inner life, inspires and refreshes the vigor and vitality of the spiritual forces which were potentially existing in each person but unfocused. Hence fasting nourishes an individual's spirituality, frees him/her from various kinds of impurities, and brings him/her near to the *Khaliq* (God).

This makes *soum*/"fast" a specific act of spiritual reflection, self-discipline, and self-control. Control of passions is necessary since the cast of the soul has to be given to please them. It is observed that when an individual is ruled by impulses his/her spiritual aspect vanishes and one "lives" like a brute animal. Contrary to this when an individual sublimates impulses and commits himself/herself to the spiritual realm and the Divine Law. This experience awakens a new consciousness in an individual that prepares a person for the highest mode of life and enables him/her to transcend from the lower level of living to the higher level. Having said that, an individual differentiates between the lowest and highest stages of life. The lowest modes of life are characterized as desire fulfillments, the materialist's slogan "eat, drink and sex" applies here whereas the highest sphere of life reflects on an individual's, spirituality, meditations, freedom from impurities of all sorts, and desire management and God-consciousness. Thus the inclinations to the highest sphere of life enable an individual to struggle and strive for *nafasi mutmaina* and *taqwa* in which eternal good, satisfaction, and bliss are promised. The highest stage of life is the individual's religious stage which is superior to all other spheres that differentiate humans from the animal and vegetable realms. Hence fasting is primarily a religious act demanded by God from an individual. It has both moral and spiritual significance. Thus fasting in the month of

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<sup>2</sup> Khan Maulana Wahiduddin, *Spirit of Ramadan*, Compiled by: Prof. Farida Khanam, Dr. Naghma Siddiqi, Good word Books, Delhi, 2021, P.13

Ramadan is an occasion to strengthen one's spirituality (self) and achieves the status of (*Insan-e Kamil*) which is the highest form of life.

Fasting is characterized as a unique spiritual and moral act. It is an act of self-constraint, a conscious and deliberate abstention from food, drink, sexual intercourse, and everything that nullifies the fast. In this sense, fasting cleanses the soul, from harmful impurities raises one's flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, and kindles the true light of chastity. In this sense, fasting is extremely relevant to the modern world as it helps an individual in manifold ways to restore wisdom, and spiritual content and leads to an ethically disciplined life. Fasting in the month of Ramadan urges people to be patient and calm and prepares an individual for charity and generosity. It also prepares people to give for the sake of others and to be compassionate towards the poor. It inculcates the feeling of empathy and love for the poor, hungry, and needy and encourages actions of charity and generosity. Thus *soum* from a moral and social perspective is a practice that promotes chastity and humility. It is the time of highest significance that prevents a believer from all sinful, immoral, and disdainful activities. Moreover, it trains a believer to cope with the outburst of uncontrolled lust, false intentions, and imagination.

The practice of *soum*, however, promotes self-discipline, by saying "no" to both lawful and unlawful practices. The believer's free, conscious and deliberate act of avoiding or abstaining from food and drink for a certain period is (lawful) on ordinary days of life but it is unlawful on the days of Ramadan. This shows that avoiding the lawful, necessities of life for a certain time has a higher aim. One of the purposes of the deliberate avoiding the lawful things impede "*paband*" obedience and *mutaqaeen* God-conscious life, Whereas abstention from the unlawful is practiced and recommended in every sphere of a believer's life. It, however, includes abstention from falsehood in speeches and practices, bad argumentations, hatred, and jealousy. In short, desisting from all impure actions and imaginations, evil and dishonest practices are the basic principles of ethical life that a true believer of Islam is supposed to perform.

It is observed that *soum* have an immense impact on human existence and society as well. The virtue of *soum*/fasting is that it helps an individual in relating to the plight of the poor and the hungry and makes one aware of the difficulties faced by several of those fellow members of the society who are deprived of one of the necessities of life like food. This creates empathy in the individual's mind and heart and gives rise to the tendency of giving to those who are deprived, resulting in charity.

Following observations walk us through the important themes and questions concerning the philosophy of *soum*/fasting in Islam. Though, one the one hand, in the month of Ramadan Muslim practice of fasting attracts people and inspires them to experience the mysteries and secrets of fasting. On the other hand, one of the important questions that many people face in the month of Ramadan is, why do Muslim Fast? Even the practice of fasting in different parts of the world was restricted out of certain misunderstandings. These misunderstandings can be removed and true understanding can be reached if we approach fasting from the

right perspective. Let's explore some important questions concerning *soum*/fasting and reflects on its philosophical aspects.

### Why do Muslims Fast in Ramadan?

During the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar Muslims keeps fast. Since fasting is an unavoidable practice of Muslims throughout the world. this practice despite restrictions imposed on certain places cannot be stopped because of its highest religious significance. Thus fasting during Ramadan is an obligatory practice for each Muslim as stated in the Qur'an, "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may guard yourself against evil and you may attain God-consciousness (*Taqwa*)"<sup>3</sup>. Another Quranic verse mentions that "He desires you to fast the whole month, so that you may glorify Him for His having guided you and so that you may be grateful to Him"<sup>4</sup>. In this context, one can ask how just by abstaining from food and drink during the day can the spirit of piety and thankfulness be inculcated. I think this is one of the important questions to unveil the true meaning and purpose of fasting. However, for any teleological purpose, all obligatory rites of worship have spirit. For instance, "the spirit of prayer is humility. The spirit of *zakat*, almsgiving, is social service. The spirit of hajj is unity, and the spirit of fasting is *sabr*, patience"<sup>5</sup>. It shows that fasting is not merely a practice of avoiding food, drink; and so on rather fasting has a spiritual and ethical purpose to create an intimate relationship of an individual with his Lord. *Sabr* patience is one of the important elements to make an individual a disciplined human unbound of the shekels of *nafas* desires. *Saber* is also one of the vital elements that guard a human person against difficult situations/tests. One must realize during fasting, a person has to temporarily eschew even lawful things, like the necessities of drink and food, without which a person cannot survive. Having said that the deliberate and conscious refrain from eating and drinking is a training course for a person to purify self and fulfill God's commands. It, however, reflects that fasting does not just mean abstaining from food and drink from dawn to dusk but rather an abstention from all inappropriate, intentions, words, and actions. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "one who keeps a fast but does not stop lying or practicing wrong ways then God does not need him to leave his food"<sup>6</sup>. It reflects that fasting has a higher purpose; though fasting is symbolic in the sense that it emphasizes complete abstention from eating, drinking, and anything that nullifies the fast to become responsible, submissive, and *paband* self-disciplined. Therefore, the goal of fasting is to develop in a human person the ability to lead his/her life bound by certain restrictions and responsibilities rather than lead an irresponsible and unrestrained life.

Furthermore, fasting in the month of Ramadan is an occasion for a believer to create an intimate relationship with the Lord. The practice of fasting enhances an individual's love for God and God's love for him/her. It is a

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<sup>3</sup> The Quran, 2:183

<sup>4</sup> The Quran, 2:185

<sup>5</sup> Khan Maulana Wahiduddin, *Spirit of Ramadan*, Compiled by: Prof. Farida Khanam, Dr. Naghma Siddiqi, Good Word Books, Delhi, 2021, P. 11

<sup>6</sup> (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 1689), Ramazan a Month of Purification P. 08

unique way to bring ourselves near to the creator and His mercy and blessings. In this sense fasting kindles and inspires the religious life of an individual and inculcates God-consciousness (*taqwa*) which is one of the fundamental endowments of fasting.

### **Taqwa( God-Fearing)**

*Taqwa* is another important axiological endowment of fasting. *Taqwa* means (God-Consciousness/ God fearing) it is a conscious mode of living willingly under the commandments of God. As Khan writes, “*Taqwa* or a God-fearing life means a cautious life. Success for a human in both worlds lies in his invariably adopting the path of caution in all matters of life. It is *taqwa*, a guarded, disciplined life of penitence that is the goal of fasting”<sup>7</sup>. Thus we can say that *taqwa* is the highest stage of mind in which a human person rigorously practices God's law and keeps himself/herself away from all forbidden things and anything that displeases God. Fearing God does not like fearing being scared of an enemy, as we fear beasts or evil forces. God is the most benevolent, The- most Loving who plans good for us. The fear of God is not mere speculation rather it includes a religious experience. The God-fearing portrayed in Quranic verses is related to the followers being aware of what is right and wrong and making a conscious effort to avoid evil. Hence this fear is more like anxiety associated with the spiritual consequences of disobedience that lead an individual to boredom, agony, and unending suffering. In this sense, this anxiety is characterized by fear of losing the love of God, mercy, and blessings. Thus Fearing God means not running away from the law of God and fearing losing the most loving and most merciful Divine reality for one’s ontological exigencies.

In this context, God-fearing, however, means spiritual nourishment and training to reach the highest *telos* in which one has to refrain from all the things forbidden by God in this worldly life. it reflects that the practice of fasting is a spiritual endeavor that trains a person training a God-fearing/conscious life”. Moreover, *taqwa* is also viewed as the purest stage of human existence and a highly disciplined sphere of human life. As the interpretations of *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, reveals

“*Taqwa* is to avoid what God dislikes. It was reported that Umar bin Khattab asked Ubayy ibn Ka'b about *Taqwa*. Ubay said, "Have you ever walked on a path that has thorns on it?" Umar said, "Yes." Ubayy asked, "What did you do then?" to which Umar replied, "I rolled up my sleeves and struggled." Ubayy said, "That is *taqwa*, to protect oneself from sin through life's dangerous journey so that one can complete the journey unscathed by sin”<sup>8</sup>. Hence *taqwa* is a spiritual experience that develops an individual’s virtuous character and cultivates in him/her a quality of *al-Sabr* patience, and *Nafas-e Mutmaeeinah* (permanent satisfaction) which is characterized as *al-Wafa* faithfulness. Hence, *taqwa* is the embodiment of righteousness, virtue; patience, satisfaction, and faithfulness which seem the important milestones humans need to achieve in contemporary times. The *Sufi* view of *taqwa* also emphasizes an individual's unique experience reflecting three parts

<sup>7</sup> Khan Maulana Wahiduddin, *Ramadan A Month of Purification*, Compiled by: Prof. Farida Khanam, Dr. Naghma Siddiqi, Good word Books, Delhi, 2021, P. 20

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad Saed Abdul-Rahman, *The Meaning and Explanation of the Glorious Quran*. MSA Publication Limited. (2009) p. 63. Retrieved 2015-07-13.

of *taqwa*: “full trust in God concerning what has not been granted to him; satisfaction with what has been granted to him; and full patience concerning what has eluded him”<sup>9</sup>.

### Self-Restraint

Self-restraint/control is one of the rational endeavors/skills required to achieve any goal. People with self-control have the motivation and tendency to override their unnecessary impulses. In the philosophical world, various philosophers emphasize the practices concerning self-restraint. Plato argued, the human experience is a constant struggle between desire and rationality, and that self-control is needed to achieve the ideal form. A famous psychologist Freud suggested that self-control was the essence of civilized life. Nietzsche also approaches self-control as an individual's attitude of sublimating impulses to become superman.

Self-restraint is one of the important concepts of ethics and spiritual studies. Self-restraint and fasting are closely related to each other. Though fasting is characterized as a practice of self-restraint. The act of fasting is largely viewed as a disciplinary act encompassing various moral and social values. Hence, fasting inculcates a moral and spiritual attitude, sharpens an individual's religious consciousness, and cultivates discipline/self-restraint. A practice of voluntarily restricting the basic things that one desires are mental and spiritual training that trains the devotee to lead a life of self-control/restraint, mindfulness, and empathy. In this context, fasting works like a “speed-breaker”<sup>10</sup> that control the speeding motorist, fasting in this uncontrolled materialistic age does for the devotee. Fasting brings an individual's spiritual realm into sharp focus and puts a “curb”<sup>11</sup> on desire fulfillment endeavors which is necessary for spiritual uplifting.

Fasting in this sense appears as one of the guiding paradigms to moral and spiritual acquisitions and awakenings. Though control over self is very important to be self-disciplined. The practice of self-control frees humanity from unethical practices and stops the practices concerning self-centeredness and selfishness. In this sense, “self-control may be characterized as the ability to regulate or resolve such conflict correctly. A well-ordered self has self-control; a disordered self lacks it. When an agent lacks self-control, inner conflict often results in the victory of evil over good.”<sup>12</sup> This model harmonizes humanity and distinguishes the human realm from that of the animal world. The command to refrain from consuming food and drink during the month of Ramadan has a practical lesson. Abstaining from food, drink and sex, and so on is a practical test to control one's desires. It is a task to eschew and put a curb on one's necessities that God has forbidden. Thus in the month of Ramadan abstention from food, drink, and everything that nullifies the fast is uncompromisingly practiced. Having said that one can ask why an individual needs to eschew the basic requirements.

Since fasting reflects living with a certain code of conduct to suspend the demands of *nafas* (desires) to please God, satisfy the heart, and cleanse the spirit and body. This vigorous act develops an individual's moral, social

<sup>9</sup> Quşairī, ‘Abd-al-Karīm Ibn-Ḥawāzin Al-. *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism: Al-Risala Al-qushayriyya Fi 'ilm Al-tasawwuf*. Reading: Garnet Publ., 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Khan Maulana Wahiduddin, *Spirit of Ramadan*, Compiled by: Prof. Farida Khanam, Dr. Naghma Siddiqi, Good word Books, Delhi, 2021, P.30

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, P. 30

<sup>12</sup> Quinn, Philip L.. Self-control, 1998, doi:10.4324/9780415249126-L089-1. Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis, <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/self-control/v-1>.

and spiritual aspects and makes a person virtuous and noble. One of the important elements of self-restraint while fasting is traced from prophetic wisdom. Muslims fasting should necessarily refrain from all kinds of evil practices as the Prophet of Islam said that “when a person who was on a fast was abused, he should say in return, “Peace be upon you, I am not the one to return abuse for abuse.” For such a person God has this to say: “My servant took refuge in fasting for someone’s evil; so I also gave him refuge from hellfire”<sup>13</sup>. It shows that Ramadan, the month of fasting, is a blessed spiritual and virtuous period for believers, for it is during this month that they do their utmost to enhance their righteousness and virtuous living, along with piety, purity, humility, truthfulness, honesty, and spirituality. Hence the aim of fasting during Ramadan is to diminish a person’s dependence on material things, so that he/she may elevate himself/herself to a higher plane of devout living.

### **Fasting as a Means to Purification**

It is stated in *Sunan Ibn Majah* that there is a purification for all things, and purification of the body is fasting.”<sup>14</sup> Just as bathing purifies the body, so does fasting purify the soul. It shows that fasting during Ramadan is an occasion fostering a culture of abstinence aimed at the purification of thought, speech, and well-being. Human ontology reflects the dichotomy of the body and soul. These two aspects material and formal design human existence, While the material part of a person, the body is indispensable for the performance of mundane tasks, it is the individual spiritual aspect (soul) that raises a person to higher realities. Though the human body is controlled by vital metaphysical entities such as the mind and soul, thus both of these driving forces need to be preserved in a state of purity. That means that just as the body requires physical nourishment, so also the soul needs to be spiritually nourished. In this context, the practice of fasting is a spiritual practice of cutting oneself off from the worldly and material aspects of the body and turning towards the transcendental realm (God). Thus fasting is a conscious course of actions through which an individual attempt to sharpen spiritual contents, purifies his/her inner and outer being, and develops a person religiously and morally. This whole course of action makes fasting in the month of Ramadan an exercise of self-purification and self-discipline.

### **Fasting as a State of Transformation**

Fasting is not just a ritual but it is a committed course of action that aims at producing the true spirit within an individual and changing his/her thinking and temperament. In this sense fasting along with other commands of God brings about a transformation in a person’s mental and moral endeavors toward good character and well-being. In this way, fasting can change the entire personality of a person so that it becomes spiritual. True fasting makes a person sincere, tolerant, and mindful to the ultimate extent. Every aspect of an individual’s personality is colored by tolerance, wisdom, reflection, seriousness, satisfaction, and so on. A person with this attitude cannot be diverted by provocations. Hence no amount of provocation deflects a person who observes fasting from the right path, this is one of the important senses in which fasting as a practice is socially and

<sup>13</sup> Tartib al-Amaliy al-Khamisiyah li Shajari, Hadith No. 1348

<sup>14</sup> (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 1745)

morally relevant and contributes to transforming ordinary people into peaceful and harmonious members of society. Thus we can say that besides enriching and harmonizing humanity at the larger level the true essence of fasting helps a person to be a modest, good, and virtuous human instead of an arrogant, immoral, and vice person.

### **Fasting a Period of Meditation**

Meditation (*zikr*) and prayer (*salah*) are the key requisites for spiritual growth. In Islam fasting in the month of Ramadan is viewed as a glorious act of meditation. Meditation prepares the believer to discern the reality of things and frees a person from animal nature by putting him/her in touch with God. Thus meditation is a unique approach to reaching and pleasing Lord. Fasting provides an unruffled platform for the human person to meditate and pray to get closer to God and His blessings. The constant, meditation, prayer, and penance, lead an individual to the highest realm of life and opens new avenues to the mysteries of the self and the *Khaliq* (creator). However, self-consciousness and God-realization become the important tendencies that an individual experiences in meditative practices. In this sense, such spiritual encounters enable a person to live with the law and the “will of the creator”<sup>15</sup>. Thus a meditative life is the secret to a successful life. As Wahidudin Khan writes, “there is no place for those who lead a permissive (*beqait*) life. The secret of success in this world of God lies in leading a disciplined (*paband*) life”<sup>16</sup>.

During Ramadan, an individual voluntarily refrains from certain practices to achieve the goal of piety and purity. The conscious and free refusal to eat and drink is a practice that puts a person to test and sharpens an individual’s meditative aspects. Having said that individual fast is a time of meditation, in the sense that it sets out a prescribed period for the individual to be intensely mindful of their inner reality. Hence, the period of fasting is essentially a period of spiritual consciousness and recuperation, meditation, and prayer, in this time the believer strives to make the necessary readjustments in his/her inner life to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his/her soul. These inner adjustments to, imagination, thoughts, beliefs, values, and so on lead to change in an individual’s outer life in terms of deeds/behaviors. In this context, a period of fasting is not only a period of meditation, self-control, repentance, worship, and spiritual convalescence but also a period to initiate readjustments of inner life, inspire and refreshed the vigor and vitality of the spiritual forces which potentially exist in each human ontology but are not empirically evident thus its needs to be realized.

### **Desire Management**

Another absorbing theme concerning fasting is the practice of handling the overloading of impulses, “desire management”. We know that fasting during the month of Ramadan is special training in abstention, purification, self-discipline, and so on. In this connection, fasting makes a person conscious of “dos and

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<sup>15</sup> Khan Maulana Wahiduddin, *Ramadan A Month of Purification*, Compiled by: Prof. Farida Khanam, Dr. Naghma Siddiqi, Good word Books, Delhi, 2021, P. 05.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, P.05



don'ts"<sup>17</sup>. This makes fasting in the month of Ramadan an ethical compass for the belief in moral and spiritual development and prepares believers for “a principled life—not merely during the month of fasting, but, in fact, for the whole year round”<sup>18</sup>.

Though fasting during the month of Ramadan is an obligatory practice. It is a practice that keeps a believer unbound of desires and guards him/her against the outburst of uncontrolled lusts and impulses. It reminds a believer that a life of desires and fulfillment is a life akin to beasts. Thus fasting is not merely a practice of avoiding/abstaining from food and drink but it also includes a war with one's *nafas*. It is, however, a deliberate commitment to keep oneself away from immoral and indecent “impulses” and “cravings”, reflected in impure and unlawful deeds. In this context, fasting appears as a course to learn to manage desires and lead a satisfying life. It reflects that an individual, who fasts, imposes self-discipline, and does not let their whims rule and ruin his/her existence. It also manifests that one who does not impose certain restrictions/ principles onto his/her existence will not be able to cope with the abyss of desires. From the ethical and spiritual point of view, one needs to control one's whims to live a principled life and realizes that failing to curb one's desires leads to desire enslavement. Fasting is a vital practice that prepares a person with spirit rather than senses. In this context, fasting becomes an exercise aimed at controlling our desires. It is a qualitative practice and a meditative formula useful in the affairs of life. As St. Augustine, one of the Christian theologians and philosophers views “fasting cleanses the soul raises the mind, subjects one's flesh to the spirit renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, and kindles the true light of chastity”<sup>19</sup>.

It, however, reflects that fasting kindles and inspires the moral and religious life of an individual and enhances an individual's faith in God. Fasting is a very hard practice it is a test for a believer to make possible sacrifices by living without food and drink for the sake of God. However, the *soum* contains a command as imperatives that wants believers to refrain from certain things. It is important to mention that God does not want an individual's food during fasting rather God refrains a believer to have food and drink to test his/her level of faith as He used to test the prophets as their level. Thus the prescribed obligatory practices are the test for a believer in the world. Having said that, an ordinary person must consider that he/she will not be tested like the prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) and the prophet Ayoob (PBUH) or any other prophets of Islam because we stand nowhere in comparison to the levels of faith. Thus our practices are prescribed as per our levels of faith and capacity. Nonetheless, our practices in conformity with Divine law are trials that restrict our worldly desires, comfort, and pleasure of the lowest kind in a certain sense and cause hardships. At the outset, it promises in return unending happiness, bliss, tranquility, and much more compensation here and hereafter. As the messenger of Allah (SAW) said, “whoever fasts during Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping to attain

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, P.11

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, P.11

<sup>19</sup> Augustine St., On Prayer and Fasting

Allah's rewards, and then all his past sins will be forgiven."<sup>20</sup>. Since a religious action is based on an individual's faith. Thus fasting is purely a religious act structured in faith. Fasting without faith is nothing but a deliberate hanger without purpose and meaning. Having said that, without faith, the reality of fasting and the mystery of the human person remain untravelled in its most profound sense.

From a moral point of view, fasting has an immense impact on human beings and the society in which they live. Fasting makes a person kind-hearted and enables him/her to awaken finer and more virtuous feelings. A person then gets able to experience what God desires of a person in this world. The virtue of fasting is that it prepares a person in relating to the predicaments of the miserable, and the hungry and makes an individual conscious of the sufferings faced by fellow members of our society. This creates empathy and a sense of sharing and caring in the individual's mind. The tendency of giving and sharing certainly supports the deprived class this social and moral framework promotes and emphasizes ideas of charity, love, sympathy, harmony, peace, and brotherhood.

During *Soum/Ramadan* evil conceals itself while good comes to the fore and the whole atmosphere is filled with piety and purity. Fasting exalts "love"; by love, one will reach the very heart of humanity and religion. In this sense, the month of Ramadan is in a deeper sense the month of "philanthropy"<sup>21</sup>, caring, and sharing. "It makes believers more sensitive about hunger and the needs of others so they engage in more and more charity"<sup>22</sup>. As Prophet Muhammad stated,

The month of fasting is the month of compassion. This explains that fasting teaches sympathy which teaches a human what the basic human requirements are. It makes him/her aware of hunger and thirst. This understanding makes him aware of the difficulties of his fellow beings and inculcates in him a sense of sympathy thereby making him share his bounties with those who are in need<sup>23</sup>.

It reveals that a "fasting person" is a person with the highest "values". We know that values are the guiding principles of life and human society is governed by established moral and social values. The relationships of human beings in every aspect are governed by these values. In this sense, values denote the degree and importance of something which helps us to determine what course of action is good to do or to avoid. In the broader perspective, it is assumed that to preserve and respect the social and moral values of society means to preserve peace, prosperity, justice, equality, love, brotherhood, etc. They maintain a social and moral structure by which social progress and other processes can be operated for a society. However, values stand for the stability and maintenance of social order and guidance for good social, moral, and responsible living. Recognizing and bringing values in real-life situations is the best approach to facilitate peace, harmony, and

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<sup>20</sup> Imam Bukhari

<sup>21</sup> Khan Maulana Wahiduddin, *Spirit of Ramadan*, Compiled by: Prof. Farida Khanam, Dr. Nagma Siddiqi, Good word Books, Delhi, 2021, P. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Khan Maulana Wahiduddin, *Ramadan A Month of Purification*, Compiled by: Prof. Farida Khanam, Dr. Nagma Siddiqi, Good word Books, Delhi, 2021, P. 43

<sup>23</sup> Sahi Bukhari, *Shu'abul Iman* by Al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 3608

moral and social development in our societies. Whenever the values have been violated and misused the peace and harmony of the society was disturbed.

Though, we all are craving sincerely for peace in the world, in our societies, and also in our hearts and minds. There are various issues in our societies today which disrupt peace and lead to a subtle increase in social instability and crisis. Such phenomena cause underestimated damage to human beings and society as well. Hence it requires to be noticed to keep the societies healthy and stable. We need to contemplate why our societies despite the educational, cultural, and religious progress existed with all sorts of immoral activities, and cruelty. Why human beings in the world today have become selfish and cunning? Are not rational humans the cause of the consequent growth of misery, tyranny, terror, and suffering in the world? Do we ever bother to examine and stand accountable for human's inhumanity to other humans and other beings? Should we not end the intolerance and unnecessary interference of others matter? All such *real-life situations* portray the conditions of a human person in the world today and such lived experiences expose the failure to uphold human values. I believe that all these problems may be solved by applying and bringing practically human values into every society. However, living with the "code of conduct" or "principle of action" is the criterion of the good life and is ethically characterized as a principled or disciplined life.

It reflects that an individual could become a good and responsible citizen of society if he/she voluntarily practices a moral code of conduct. Since an individual is free either to live with established norms/principles or free oneself from social, moral, and other responsibilities. Though, it is not rational to live without certain moral codes. Humanity's moral and rational behaviors distinguished them from the animal realm. However, living with certain standards and principles might put restrictions on an individual's premature choices but in the long run, it expands his/her virtuous aspects of life encompassing moral considerations, a sense of responsibility, care, and concern for others. In this sense, the presence and practice of human values in a given society test a person to choose between moral and immoral, vice and virtuous ways of living.

Fasting is largely viewed as Muslims crucial and sacred period in which an individual undergoes ethical and spiritual practices that shape his/her true religious life/character. It manifests that *soum*/fasting is one of the important paradigms/practices of Muslims entailing the code of conduct for the moral, social, and religious development of an individual. Having said that, fasting is a semblance of this test, we know that the worldly life is an opportunity for a believer to perform good deeds and avoid all sorts of evil as enjoined by God. This opportunity comes with a burden of responsibility and restrictions. Whosoever, welcome the Divine law and applies such restrictions as speed-breakers for the development of selfhood. Thus for this conscientious life, there are boundless and endless rewards in the hereafter which are unexposed to worldly people.

Though fasting in a realistic sense put restrictions on our ordinary practices but in a moral and spiritual sense it gives an awareness of the patience and struggle towards disciplined life. In the same spirit, Soum portrays a believer's hardship, struggle, and difficulties to reach the goal of self-restraint, containment, purity, and *taqwa*. It reflects that worldly life is a test for a believer to face the adversity, difficulty, and sufferings of the world and learn to manage and transcend such situations with patience, prayers, and wise endeavors. Thus the

restrictions an individual faces in the month of soum/Ramadan are meant to train him/her for good, satisfied, and mindful living. However, “having undergone the period of fasting most sincerely, He feels as if he is being entertained as a guest by God Himself. From the depths of his being, his heart cries out”<sup>24</sup>.

Besides individual’s spiritual nourishment and progress the overall framework of soum/Ramadan and the true spirit of fasting inculcate unique social and moral qualities such as love; compassion, care, affection, kindness, benevolence, peace, dignity, respect, forgiveness, and so on in an individual and make him/her the best human being. The practice of fasting is bound to promote these necessary values. In this context, fasting proposes a framework as an important paradigm to counter immoral and uncivilized phenomena. It seems, with recognition and application of this paradigm in *real-life situations* humanity can achieve peace, unity, and harmony among the living and non-living creatures of the world. Therefore, fasting in the month of Ramadan turns a believer towards his/her *Khaliq* (Creator). Turning to *Khaliq* has a spiritual value, necessarily it means living with all His commandments by heart and deed and this is in my view the mark of true wisdom that keeps a believer on the highest pedestal of selfhood where God is pleased with his/her servant and asks him/her what are your cravings? What do you want? Allama Iqbal puts it “develop the self so that before every decree God will ascertain from you: What is your wish”<sup>25</sup>? This turning to God is an individual’s metaphysical engagement that opens new ways to the adventures of being religious. Thus the experience of turning to God is not in a physical sense, but having one’s heart and mind continually directed towards God. hence whatever bodily activity one may be engaged in. When a person has elevated himself/herself from the world, God endows him/her with reflective thinking and wisdom, which guides a person on how to live and make life worthwhile.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, P. 29

<sup>25</sup> Iqbal Sir Mohammad, *Bal-i Jibreel*, Trans.D. J. Matthews; Naim Siddiqui; Syed Akbar Ali Shah, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2014, p. 267.