

Mistakes to Avoid during Ramadhan

By Shaykh Salman Al-Oadah

Muslims make a number of mistakes during this auspicious month. These mistakes vary from country to country and from culture to culture, and there are many reasons why they happen. Sometimes they can be attributed to local customs and traditions. Sometimes they occur because of a misapplication of Islamic Law. At other times, the reason for the mistake is the desire to express happiness and joy during this blessed month. At other times, simple ignorance is to blame. Whatever the reason, the outcome is the same: a violation of Islamic teachings in a matter of worship. This is serious, since matters of worship in Islam are established and defined by the sacred texts.

The Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam said: "Whoever introduces something new into this matter of ours will have it rejected." [Saheeh al-Bukhaari (2550) and Saheeh Muslim (1718)]

Some of the mistakes people make in Ramadhan are serious enough to be violations of Islamic Law. Some mistakes are innovations. Other mistakes are less serious, causing the person who errs to act in a way that is undesirable. These mistakes can relate to the fast itself or to other customs and practices associated with it.

Neglecting Congregational Prayer

Many people increase their worship in Ramadhan and frequent the mosques more than usual. However, some people fall short during this month of their observance of congregational prayer and neglect the mosque. This is a mistake, for there is a hadeeth that reads: "Whoever hears the call to prayer but does not hearken to it, then he has no prayer." [Sunan al-Tirmidhi (217)]

`Alî b. Abî Tâlib said: "There is no prayer for the neighbour of the masjid except in the mosque." [Musannaf `Abd al-Razzaaq (1915) and Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah (3469)] No doubt, neglect congregational prayer is something serious. It is even more serious to neglect prayer altogether. A hadeeth reads: "The covenant between us and them is prayer. Whoever abandons it has disbelieved." [Sunan al-Tirmidhî (2621)]

The Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam said: "Whoever abandons the `Asr prayer, his deeds are lost." [Saheeh al-Bukhaari (528)]

There are numerous other hadeeth that stress the importance of prayer. May Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala protect us from neglecting our prayers.

A Muslim should safeguard his worship and be steadfast in prayer. Ramadhan should be an opportunity for us to change for the better and habituate ourselves to doing good deeds.

Backbiting & Rumour-Mongering

Speaking badly about other people is a way to seriously compromise one's fasting. The Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam defined backbiting in the following way:

He said: "Do you know what backbiting is?"

They said: "Allaah and His Messenger know best."

He said: "It is to mention about your brother something that he would dislike having mentioned about him." [Saheeh Muslim (2589)] Someone enquired: "O Messenger of Allaah! How do you see it if what I said about him is true?" He replied: "If what you said about him is true, then you have backbitten him. If what you said about him is false, then you have slandered him." [Saheeh Muslim (2589)] Another evil is to spread what people say about each other in order to bring about problems. This rumour-mongering also includes divulging secrets and exposing people's faults. Hudhayfah heard about a man who was spreading rumours and he said: "I heard Allaah's Messenger say: 'A rumour-monger will not enter Paradise.'" [Saheeh al-Bukhaari (6056) and Saheeh Muslim (105)]

Vulgar Speech and Bad Manners

Aboo Hurayrah relates that the Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam said: "Whoever does not abandon false speech and acting falsely, then Allaah has no need of his abandoning food and drink." [Saheeh al-Bukhaari (1903)] The Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam said: "Fasting is a shield, so the one who fasts should avoid obscene speech and ignorant behavior. If someone abuses him or starts to fight with him, he should reply by saying: 'I am fasting. I am fasting.'" [Saheeh al-Bukhaari (1795)] Ibn Hajar writes in Fath al-Baari (4/105): The hadeeth means that the fasting person should not respond to the one who abuses him with the same kind of behavior. He should restrain himself by saying: "I am fasting."

Laziness and Listlessness

Some people take the Ramadhaan fast as an excuse for laziness. In this, they behave in stark contrast to the ways of our Pious Predecessors, who had no qualms with working hard in Ramadhaan and even rallying to the defense of the faith. They definitely did not become lax in their regular, daily worship. Indeed, they would increase their religious observances in this month.

Some people justify their laziness with the weak hadeeth that reads: "The sleep of the fasting person is worship." If, for the sake of argument, we assume that the hadeeth is authentic, it does not justify laziness. It certainly does not pardon the practice of those who sleep all day in Ramadhaan and then spend the nights in feasting and merriment. The hadeeth refers to the normal sleeping habits of the person, like the person's usual daily nap. This normal sleep helps invigorate the person for further acts of worship. It is necessary for a person to capitalize on the opportunity for blessings that the month of Ramadhaan has to offer. A Muslim should strive to the utmost to earn Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta'aala's reward during this month, keeping in mind that there is no guarantee of his living to see another Ramadhaan.

Excessive Eating and Drinking

Some people spend their nights in Ramadhaan filling their stomachs with all types of food and drink, sometimes indulging in delicacies that they do not ever eat outside of Ramadhaan. This practice, without doubt, contradicts the very essence of Ramadhaan and the wisdom behind our fasting.

It is related from al-Miqdâm b. Ma'di Yakrib that the Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam said: "The human being does not fill up any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for a person to eat just enough to keep his back straight. If he must eat more, then he can fill a third with food, a third with drink, and leave a third for air." [Sunan al-Tirmidhî (2380)]

How can a person learn to subdue his base impulses and desires through fasting, when he makes up for it all by indulging his every whim at night, eating even more during Ramadhaan than he does during the rest of the year? In some places, people have a custom of storing food and reserving it for Ramadhaan, so that they consume in Ramadhaan the quantity of food that would usually take them months to eat. We all know that the purpose of fasting is to rein in our passions and break our desires in order to grow in piety. If we allow our hunger to build in strength from dawn to dinner time only to then indulge our hunger with greater gusto, this merely magnifies the pleasure of eating. It strengthens our passions more than if we had been left to our normal eating patterns.

Getting Angry

Some people seem to think that their bad tempers are excused because they are fasting. They allow their anger its full spectrum of expression, saying the most horrible things and doing the most preposterous deeds. A fasting person needs to adorn his fast with magnanimity and good manners. He should remind himself that the Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam said: "The strong person is not the one who can wrestle someone else down. The strong person is the one who can control himself when he is angry." [Saheeh al-Bukhaari (5763) and Saheeh Muslim (2609)]

Abandoning Fasting Without an Excuse

Abandoning a Ramadhaan fast without a valid excuse is a major sin. A person who falls into this sin must repent sincerely and earnestly to his Lord. He must also make up the days that he missed later. He must also provide a meal for a poor person for each day that he missed if he is financially able to do so. Fasting is one of the five pillars of the religion of Islam. A person who openly abandons the Ramadhaan fast should be rebuked for doing so and not left to be a bad example for others.

Women Putting on Perfume to Go to the Masjid

Some women put on attractive perfumes to when they go to the mosque at night in Ramadhaan. This is a mistake. The Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam said: "Any woman who dons perfume should refrain from attending the 'Ishaa' congregation with us." [Saheeh Muslim (444)] The Prophet sall Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam also said: "Any woman who puts on perfume and then walks by people so they can get a whiff of her perfume is a wanton woman." [Sunan al-Tirmidhi (2786) and Sunan al-Nasaa'i (5126)]

Staying Up Late

This is a mistake if it leads to bad consequences. Some people stay up late at night and then sleep through the Fajr prayer. Some even sleep through the Zuhr and 'Asr prayers. If they force themselves to get up during the day, they can suffer extreme fatigue on account of it. If they are employees, their performance at work suffers. Such people need to keep cognizant of the blessings of this month that they lose out on because of these consequences.

