

SIFAH LECTURE SERIES

Meeting the Guest of Mercy: A Heart-First Preparation for Ramadan

A practical lecture — knowledge you can act on

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SIFAH

SCHOOL OF ISLAMIC
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ADVOCACY FOR HUMANITY

Meeting the Guest of Mercy: A Heart-First Preparation for Ramadan

Ramadan does not ask you for new deeds — it asks for your old deeds with a new heart, and for the courage to finally leave the sins you have made peace with.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A Guest Is Almost at Your Door

My dear brother, my dear sister, let me ask you something honestly before we begin. If you knew that in a few short weeks an honoured guest was coming to your home, a guest who would only stay thirty days and then leave, a guest whose visit could change the entire trajectory of your year and perhaps your entire eternity, what would you do? You would not wait until the guest was knocking at the door to start cleaning. You would prepare the house. You would clear out the clutter. You would ready your heart to receive them. And yet here we are, with the greatest guest of the year drawing near, and most of us are still living as though it is a distant rumour rather than an imminent reality.

Ramadan is coming. Say it slowly and let it land: *Ramadan is coming*. The month of forgiveness, the month of mercy, the month in which the very gates of Paradise are flung open and the gates of the Fire are slammed shut and the devils themselves are shackled in chains. That month is racing toward us, and the question is not whether it will arrive, because it will, with or without our permission. The question is whether it will find us ready, whether it will find a heart that has been softened and prepared, or a heart that is still cluttered with the same distractions and the same comfortable sins we carried all year long.

I want you to notice the very first thing that a season like this should stir inside a believing heart, and it is not panic, and it is not a frantic list of tasks. It is **gratitude**. Think about the Lord we have. He is under no obligation to forgive you. He is under no obligation to show you a single ounce of mercy. And yet, year after year, He sends you an entire month dedicated to nothing but forgiveness and mercy, a whole season designed by Him to draw out the better version of you. What kind of Lord does that? A Lord who wants you to know Him as ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, the One who keeps appointing times for you to come home.

So before you write a single goal, before you plan a single page of Qur'an, I want the first response in your heart to be two simple words: **Alhamdulillah**. Alhamdulillah that Allah allowed me to reach this

again. Because not everyone who fasted beside you last Ramadan will be fasting beside you this year. Some of them are in their graves now. To wake up on the first morning of the month, alive, breathing, able to bend your body in worship, is itself a gift so enormous that it deserves a prostration of thanks. Do not walk past that miracle as though it were nothing.

THE HEART OF THE MONTH

Named Once, Defined Simply

Here is something that should stop you in your tracks. Ramadan, this month that dominates the entire spiritual calendar of a Muslim's life, this month around which our whole year seems to orbit, is mentioned by name only *once* in the entire Qur'an. Only once. And when Allah finally names it, He does not define it by hunger, and He does not define it by staying up all night, and He does not define it by some secret hidden ritual. He defines it by one single thing.

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ
وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ
فَلْيَصُمْهُ

The month of Ramadan is that in which the Qur'an was revealed, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and the criterion. So whoever among you witnesses the month, let him fast it.

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:185)

The month of the Qur'an. That is its identity. That is its centre of gravity. And I want you to sit with the fact that its secret was never some obscure act of worship you had never heard of. Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy on him, compared this one month among the twelve to the Prophet Yusuf among his brothers, the one beloved son through whom all the others were honoured and elevated. Just as Yusuf

was singled out and cherished, so Ramadan is singled out from the calendar, and through this single blessed month the whole rest of your year is made bright.

And listen to how the Prophet ﷺ described what actually happens to the unseen world the moment this month arrives. This is not poetry. This is a change in the very fabric of reality.

إِذَا دَخَلَ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ فَتُحْتُ أَبْوَابُ الْجَنَّةِ، وَغُلِقَتْ
أَبْوَابُ النَّارِ، وَصُفِّدَتِ الشَّيَاطِينُ

When the month of Ramadan enters, the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of the Fire are closed, and the devils are chained.

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 1899 and Sahih Muslim: 1079 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Do you understand what you are being told here? You are about to step into a month where the very environment has changed around you. The air itself feels lighter for the believer. The heart becomes more receptive. Even the small efforts you make carry an unusual, magnified weight. This imagery was not given to you merely as information to file away. It was given to you to **stir hope**. To make you say to yourself: if the whole cosmos is tilting toward mercy for one month, then surely there is room in that mercy for someone like me.

NO SECRET FORMULA

Only the Ordinary, Done Beautifully

Now here is a truth we constantly miss, and I want you to hear it clearly because it will free you from so much anxiety. Everything you are asked to do in Ramadan is something you are already supposed to be doing. There is nothing new on the list. You are simply asked to do it *better*. The Companions prayed the night prayer throughout the entire year, but when Ramadan came they pushed themselves further and deeper. You do not go searching for some special new book in Ramadan. You return to the same Qur'an you already own, but now you read it with more devotion and you cling to it more closely.

You already know how to pray. You already know how to give charity. You already know how to raise your hands and make du'a. Ramadan does not hand you a new religion. It simply asks you to make more of what you already have, and to make it with a deeper sense of longing. There are no secret hacks here. The path to Allah does not change in Ramadan. Only your **effort** upon that path changes.

Let me tell you a story that captures this perfectly. When people came to Aishah, may Allah be pleased with her, with their notebooks open and their pens ready, they wanted the numbers. How many units did the Prophet ﷺ pray at night in Ramadan? Give us the count. Give us the formula. And do you know what she did? She turned them away from the numbers entirely. She told them he did not exceed a certain number of units, and then she said something that should be written on the wall of every heart: do not ask about how long and how beautiful those prayers were. She redirected them from quantity to quality, from counting to connection, from the calculator to the heart.

And when they asked her about his character, she answered with a phrase that contained an entire library in a few words: *his character was the Qur'an*. He was a walking, breathing embodiment of everything he recited and everything he taught. This is not a coincidence. This is the very lesson Allah planted at the foundation of your creation. He did not create you to produce the greatest number of deeds. He created you to produce the best of them.

ج
الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا
وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ

*He who created death and life to test you as to **which of you is best in deed**. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.*

Surah Al-Mulk (67:2)

Notice the precise word Allah chose: *ahsanu amala*, the best in deed. Not *aktharu amala*, the most in deed. So when we walk into Ramadan and begin measuring it only by tallies and totals, by pages counted and units accumulated, we risk losing the entire point of the exercise. Hear this and let it comfort you: a

heart that is truly present in a few deeds is dearer to Allah than a distracted, absent heart drowning in many. Quality is the currency of this month, not quantity.

THE GENEROSITY OF THE PROPHET ﷺ

A Walking Storm of Good

Let me show you how the Prophet ﷺ himself approached this month, because his example dismantles our obsession with measurement. He was the most generous of all people in every single season of his life. That was simply who he was, all year round. But when Ramadan arrived, his generosity did not just increase by some polite percentage. It reached a level that literally cannot be measured.

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ أَجْوَدَ النَّاسِ، وَكَانَ أَجْوَدُ مَا
يَكُونُ فِي رَمَضَانَ حِينَ يَلْقَاهُ جِبْرِيلُ، فَلَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ
أَجْوَدُ بِالْخَيْرِ مِنَ الرِّيحِ الْمُرْسَلَةِ

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was the most generous of people, and he was at his most generous in Ramadan when Jibril would meet him. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was more generous in doing good than the blowing wind.

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 6 and Sahih Muslim: 2308 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

More generous than the blowing wind. Think about that image. You cannot quantify the wind. You cannot reduce it to a spreadsheet or a percentage. It moves freely, abundantly, without counting, touching everything in its path. That is what the Prophet ﷺ became in Ramadan. He did not simply add a fixed amount to his charity. He became a **different order of generous**, a walking storm of good, giving with a heart so open that measurement became meaningless. This is what worship looks like when the heart is leading and the calculator has been thrown away.

So my dear brother, my dear sister, I want you to enter this month not asking how little you can get away with, but wanting to become like the wind. Not counting your good, but pouring it out. When you visit the sick, when you feed the fasting, when you slip a note of charity to someone struggling, do it the way the wind blows, freely and without keeping score.

WHAT THE FAST REVEALS

Alone With Allah, Without Being Alone

There is a quieter gift hidden inside this month, one that is so easy to overlook that many people fast for decades and never notice it. Ramadan teaches you how to be alone with Allah without feeling alone. We live in a world that is addicted to noise. Notifications, screens, the constant demand for our attention. And fasting does something strange and beautiful: it pulls a person inward. The hunger quiets you. The long nights soften you. And slowly, you begin to hear your own thoughts again, thoughts that had been drowned out for months.

That can be deeply uncomfortable. When you finally sit still after Fajr, while the rest of the world is still asleep, and there is no screen to reach for and no distraction to hide behind, you come face to face with yourself. But I promise you, in that discomfort is growth. That stillness after Fajr is not emptiness. It is Allah inviting you into a space that very few people ever accept. Most people run from it. The believer learns to sit inside it and let it change him.

And notice too that Ramadan is a great leveller. It is not impressed by your job title, your bank balance, or your social media following. All of that falls away. Whether a person is famous or unknown, wealthy or barely getting by, everyone stands shoulder to shoulder in the exact same posture of need before Allah. Across the entire world, believers rise before dawn and break their fast at sunset in a single, unified rhythm. You could be in a different city, speaking a different language, and yet you share the very same hunger and the very same hope with a soul on the other side of the earth.

And that shared experience widens the heart. When you feel that thirst clawing at your throat in the afternoon, you suddenly remember the people who feel it every single day, not by choice, but because they have nothing. When your stomach aches with hunger, you finally understand vulnerability in a way no lecture could ever teach you. Ramadan stretches your compassion far beyond the small, tight circle of your own concerns. It makes you human again.

What Truly Controls You

Fasting also does something confronting: it exposes your attachments. When you give up food and drink for a day, you suddenly notice how quietly dependent you had become on comfort. When you set aside your usual distractions, you realise with a jolt how often you were running to them, not out of need, but to avoid sitting with yourself. The fast holds up a mirror and reveals what truly controls you. And in that exposure lies a gift, because now you have the chance to **reclaim that control** and hand it back to Allah.

You begin to taste a strange and wonderful freedom hidden inside the discipline. You realise, perhaps for the first time in years, that you are stronger than your impulses. That the craving does not command you. That you can say no. And that realisation builds a quiet, unshakable confidence in your relationship with your Lord. This reshapes what you even understand strength to be. Because real strength, the Prophet ﷺ taught us, is not loud, and it is not stubbornness, and it is not ego.

لَيْسَ الشَّدِيدُ بِالصُّرْعَةِ، إِنَّمَا الشَّدِيدُ الَّذِي يَمْلِكُ نَفْسَهُ
عِنْدَ الْغَضَبِ

*The strong man is not the one who overpowers people in wrestling. The strong man is **the one who controls himself at the moment of anger.***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 6114 and Sahih Muslim: 2609 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Real strength is holding back when every cell in your body wants to react. It is continuing when you are exhausted. It is mastering yourself when your temper flares up and demands to be released. And do you see what the fast is doing? Hour after hour, it is training exactly this internal muscle. Every time you resist the food in front of you, you are strengthening the same self-control that lets you swallow an angry word, forgive an insult, and hold your tongue. And that mastery does not stay in the stomach. It spreads into your home, into your workplace, into your marriage, into your speech. Ramadan is a training camp for the soul.

They Had No Shortcuts, Only Love

There is a beautiful lesson in the generation that came right after the Companions, the tabi'un, those who met the Companions but never met the Prophet ﷺ himself. They were famous for the sheer, staggering abundance of their good deeds, and the reason why is worth pausing over, because it will humble us. They always felt as though they were running behind. Why? Because they walked among people who had actually prayed beside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who had heard his voice with their own ears and seen his blessed face with their own eyes.

Imagine being a young man of that generation. Your mother and father speak casually of the time they hosted the Prophet ﷺ for a meal. Your neighbours are the very Companions who fought at Badr. And you feel this ache inside, this sense that you have so much catching up to do, that you arrived just a little too late. That feeling did not crush them. It *drove* them. It drove them to worship with an eagerness that we, honestly, rarely come close to matching.

And here is the sharp contrast with us. We chase what we now call tips and hacks. The quick method. The five-step shortcut to a productive Ramadan. We treat the month like a project to be optimised. But that generation had no shortcuts, and they wanted none. They simply **loved the worship** and threw their whole selves into it. Look at Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, may Allah be pleased with him, a man given life by the Qur'an, whose recitation once brought the Prophet ﷺ himself to tears. When the people of his time asked how the Companions used to receive the month of Ramadan, his answer was not a technique at all. It was about the heart. He said they would not dare meet the new moon of the month while a grudge still lived inside them. That purity of heart, that eagerness, is the real preparation. It is worth more than any list of tasks you could ever write.

The Holes in the Bucket

Why was fasting prescribed at all? Allah did not leave us to guess or speculate. He attached the purpose directly to the command, right there in the same verse, so we would never lose sight of the goal.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى
الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

*O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, **that you may attain taqwa.***

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183)

That you may attain taqwa. The fast was never written so that you would simply grow hungry. It was written so that you would grow *conscious of Allah*, so that you would leave off the things that displease Him. And now we arrive at a truth that so many of us overlook, and I need you to be honest with yourself as I say it. We march into Ramadan with a long, ambitious list of good deeds we want to add. But we quietly keep the sins we have grown comfortable with. The sins we commit so consistently, so casually, that we have stopped even seeing them as sins. We have accepted them as part of who we are.

The scholars gave us an image for this that I have never forgotten. They compared such sins to **holes in the bottom of a bucket**. You can pour twenty gallons of Qur'an and night prayer and charity into that bucket. But if the holes remain, the water drains straight out, as fast as you pour it in. You exhaust yourself pouring, and at the end the bucket is empty. Taqwa is plugging the holes. It is leaving off what displeases Allah so that what you pour in actually *stays*. And the Prophet ﷺ warned us about this with terrifying clarity.

مَنْ لَمْ يَدَعْ قَوْلَ الزُّورِ وَالْعَمَلَ بِهِ، فَلَيْسَ لِلَّهِ حَاجَةٌ
فِي أَنْ يَدَعَ طَعَامَهُ وَشَرَابَهُ

Whoever does not give up false speech and acting upon it, Allah has no need of his giving up his food and his drink.

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 1903 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Reflect on the sheer weight of this. It is entirely possible to endure the whole fast, to go hungry and thirsty from the first light of dawn until the setting of the sun, and to gain absolutely nothing of what Allah intended, because the tongue kept lying, the eyes kept wandering to what was forbidden, and the heart kept nursing its grudges. The fast of the body means very little if the limbs are not fasting from sin right alongside it. So before you build your list of what to add, build your list of what to *leave*. That is the real work.

THE FIVE LISTS

Prepare the Heart Before the Schedule

So let me give you a framework, not the usual framework of piling on more and more tasks, but a deeper preparation that I want to frame as five simple lists. Most of us, when Ramadan approaches, reach straight for a to-do list, a tally of good deeds to accumulate. That list has its place, but it should never be the first one you write.

The first list is the **to-not-do list**, and in the sight of Allah it is more important than all the others. This is the set of sins you commit to leaving once and for all. The lifestyle sins you have accepted as part of yourself. The habits you resolve never to return to. When a person stands before Allah and says, after this Ramadan I will never knowingly return to this sin, I will do everything in my power to root it out of my life, that single resolve is more precious to Allah than a mountain of deeds checked off a sheet. Because you were created to return to Him, and your to-not-do list is you turning back onto your natural path.

The second list is the familiar **to-do list**, the quantifiable goals for the month itself: this much Qur'an each day, this many units of night prayer, this measure of charity. Good, keep it, but keep it in second place. The third list is one that almost nobody writes, and it may be the one that unlocks your forgiveness: the **to-fix list**, the strained relationships you intend to repair before the month even begins. This matters because a grudge can stand between a servant and the acceptance of everything he does.

تُفْتَحُ أَبْوَابُ الْجَنَّةِ يَوْمَ الْإِثْنَيْنِ وَالْأَرْبَعَةِ، فَيُغْفَرُ لِكُلِّ
عَبْدٍ لَا يَشْرِكُ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا، إِلَّا رَجُلًا كَانَتْ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ
أَخِيهِ شَحَاءٌ، فَيَقَالُ: أَنْظِرُوا هَذَيْنِ حَتَّى يَصْطَلِحَا

The gates of Paradise are opened on Monday and Thursday, and every servant who associates nothing with Allah is forgiven, except a man between whom and his brother is enmity. It is said: Leave these two until they reconcile.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 2565 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Imagine it. The forgiveness is flowing, poured out generously over the whole ummah, and your name alone is held back from the list, delayed, suspended, only because of a grudge you refused to release. The early generation understood this so deeply that they would not even allow Ramadan to find them with an atom's weight of bitterness in their hearts. So pick up the phone. Call that person. Visit that home. Break that standoff. Not because you were entirely in the wrong, but because you want Allah to forgive you, and the One who loves to pardon has asked you to pardon first. This is the very spirit of the du'a the Prophet ﷺ taught Aishah for the final nights, the nights when forgiveness is poured out like rain: *O Allah, You are Pardoning and You love to pardon, so pardon me.*

The fourth list is the **consistency list**. It looks like a quantity list, but with a crucial difference: it is the list of deeds you intend to carry *beyond* Ramadan, the worship you can realistically sustain once the month has packed up and left. Because Allah loves the deed that endures even more than the deed that is large.

أَحَبُّ الْأَعْمَالِ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَدْوَمُهَا وَإِنْ قَلَّ

*The most beloved of deeds to Allah are **the most constant of them, even if they are few.***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 6464 and Sahih Muslim: 783 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Do not wait until the last night of Ramadan to scramble for the scraps of a habit. Decide now what you can carry afterward. Perhaps two units of night prayer every single night. Perhaps one page of Qur'an that never breaks. And the fifth and deepest list of all is the **qualities list**. Open the beginning of Surah al-Mu'minun and the closing passage of Surah al-Furqan, where Allah paints a portrait of the successful believers and the servants of the Most Merciful, and hold yourself honestly against that portrait.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ
خَاشِعُونَ

Certainly will the believers have succeeded: *those who are humbly submissive in their prayer.*

Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:1-2)

Ask yourself where you stand against each quality. What is keeping you from it? Which environments do you need to change? Who do you need around you to grow into it? Because the highest rooms of Paradise are not won by the raw number of deeds. They are won by the *character* of the one who does them.

DO NOT FEAR THE SMALL

Quiet Change Is the Most Lasting

And here I want to give you real comfort, because I know some of you are already feeling overwhelmed. Real transformation does not require a spectacle. We so often imagine that change has to be dramatic to

be real, that unless we have some earth-shattering night of tears it does not count. But with Allah, the quiet change is usually the most lasting change. The Prophet ﷺ would sometimes stand through an entire night repeating a single verse. Depth rather than display. Sincerity rather than performance.

So a softened heart. A tongue that finally learned to hold back. A grievance that was at last forgiven and released. These are monumental shifts, even when no one else sees them, even when they would never make it onto any impressive list you could show off. Do not despise the small, hidden change. Remember, the most beloved deeds to Allah are the consistent ones. A heart needs constant care, not seasonal care. It is not an engine you repair once in Ramadan and then abandon for the other eleven months. Small actions, repeated with sincerity, are what keep the heart alive long after the month is gone.

Our age has trained us to hunt for the hack, the pro tip, the shortcut, and we drag that same habit into Ramadan, asking, what is the trick to make this month work? But the Companions had no tricks, and they needed none. When they were asked how they received the month, the answer was always about the heart, never about a method. So do not let the math swallow the meaning. When you begin to quantify absolutely everything, you can lose the very thing you came for. Allah knows exactly what you mean when you raise your hands, even in the simplest, brokenest words. The most beloved supplications of the Prophet ﷺ were short and comprehensive, because Allah does not need your eloquence. He wants your **sincerity**.

يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ، ثَبِّتْ قَلْبِي عَلَى دِينِكَ

O Turner of the hearts, make my heart firm upon Your religion.

Source: Sunan at-Tirmidhi: 2140 · **Authenticity:** Hasan

This is the supplication we need most around a season like Ramadan. Because the great danger is not failing to begin. The great danger is failing to remain. How many hearts are set ablaze in the last ten nights and then grow cold and dark by the middle of Shawwal? So ask the One who turns the hearts to keep yours turned toward Him. Do not trust your own consistency; trust His grip on your heart.

Steady Preparation Is Prophetic

Let me be practical with you, because preparation genuinely matters. Sudden transformation is rare. Steady preparation is prophetic. The Prophet ﷺ increased his voluntary worship in Sha'ban, the month right before Ramadan, so that when the great month arrived he entered it with momentum rather than shock, warmed up rather than starting cold. So take his example and apply it now, in the weeks you still have.

If your sleep schedule is chaotic, begin fixing it now, before the month demands your nights. If your tongue has grown careless with backbiting and idle talk, begin restraining it now, so it is not a foreign struggle when you are fasting. If your Qur'an has been sitting closed on the shelf for months, open it now, before Ramadan opens you. A little movement now saves you from a painful jolt later. Do not walk into Ramadan cold and expect to sprint from day one. Walk in already jogging.

And when the month finally arrives, enter it with gratitude rather than anxiety. Remember that not everyone who hoped to reach it was granted the chance to see it. Waking up on that first blessed morning and saying Alhamdulillah carries a weight you cannot possibly measure, because Allah, out of all the souls He could have chosen, chose you to witness another Ramadan. That alone is a mercy worth weeping over.

One more practical thing that changes everything: do not let the recitation of tarawih pass over you like background noise. You stand there and long portions of the Qur'an wash over you, and yet the mind so often drifts and wanders the moment the prayer ends. Reflection begins *after* the tasleem, not only during the recitation. On the walk home, ask yourself: what did Allah speak about tonight? Was He warning, comforting, correcting, or reminding? Even recalling a single theme is an act of worship. If He spoke of patience, ask where patience is missing in your life. If He spoke of mercy, ask who deserves mercy from you. This is how tarawih stops being a routine that ends at the door of the masjid and becomes a transformation that follows you all the way home.

A Clean Slate, Wider Than Your Regret

So what does Allah actually promise the one who enters this month with faith and sincerity? He promises a clean slate. A fresh beginning. The entire past wiped away as though it never happened.

مَنْ صَامَ رَمَضَانَ إِيمَانًا وَاحْتِسَابًا غُفِرَ لَهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ
ذَنْبِهِ

*Whoever fasts Ramadan out of faith and in hope of reward, **his past sins will be forgiven.***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 38 and Sahih Muslim: 760 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Out of faith and in hope of reward. Those two conditions must be present. Without sincere intention, even enormous effort can ring hollow and empty. So renew your purpose before the month begins. Decide, firmly and consciously, that this Ramadan will not be a cultural routine you sleepwalk through, but a deliberate return to your Lord. Enter it humbled and hopeful, trusting that the same One who invited you to it will also carry you through it.

Now, I know many of you walk toward Ramadan carrying a heavy weight of regret. You remember the prayers you missed. The chances you squandered. The habits you slipped into and could not seem to climb out of. But hear this clearly, and let it lift the weight from your shoulders: **this month was not sent to shame you. It was sent to restore you.** Allah describes Himself as ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, the Most Merciful, more than by any other quality, and He told us through His Prophet ﷺ, in a sacred narration, exactly where His mercy stands in relation to everything else.

إِنَّ رَحْمَتِي سَبَقَتْ غَضَبِي

*Indeed, **My mercy has preceded My anger.***

Source: Sahih Muslim: 2751 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Ramadan is a living, breathing example of that mercy. It is not a month that reminds you how far you have fallen. It is a month that shows you how close you can return. Your faith will rise and fall like waves rather than run in a perfect straight line, and Allah knew that about you before He ever created you. So

the point was never to be flawless. The point is to keep returning. The door of repentance is never truly closed. It only ever *feels* closed when our perspective grows narrow and Shaytan whispers that it is all too late for someone like you. Fight that thought before you fight anything else, because if your thinking about Allah is broken, your actions will follow it straight down into despair.

THE GREATEST TREASURE

Do Not Sleep Through the Last Ten

And my dear brother, my dear sister, whatever you do, do not let the final stretch of this month slip through your fingers, because that is exactly where its greatest treasure is buried. Watch what happened to the worship of the Prophet ﷺ as those last ten nights approached. It did not fade with fatigue. It did not wind down as the finish line came into view. It **intensified**.

كَانَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ إِذَا دَخَلَ الْعَشْرُ شَدَّ مِثْرَهُ، وَأَحْيَا
لَيْلَهُ، وَأَيْقَظَ أَهْلَهُ

*When the last ten nights began, the Prophet ﷺ would **tighten his waistcloth, spend his night in worship, and wake his family.***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 2024 and Sahih Muslim: 1174 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

There was urgency in his worship. Not panic, but purpose. Because he understood that folded within these ten nights lies a single night that outweighs an entire lifetime.

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months.

Surah Al-Qadr (97:3)

Better than a thousand months. More than eighty years of ordinary worship, compressed and poured into a single night. This is why the believer searches for it in those last ten nights, standing in prayer, pouring out that beloved du'a: O Allah, You are Pardoning and You love to pardon, so pardon me. And notice how quickly this month moves. You blink, and the first ten nights are gone. You blink again, and suddenly you are frantically searching for Laylat al-Qadr. As the month begins to close, a bittersweet worry settles over the sincere heart: did I do enough? Was my du'a accepted? Was my effort truly sincere? And I want to reassure you about that very worry, because it is beautiful. That vulnerability means your heart is alive. A heart that fears it did not do enough for Allah is a heart that Allah has not abandoned.

A REMINDER CARRIED HOME

Meet Your Guest Ready

So let me gather it all together for you as you carry this home. Ramadan is a guest of mercy, drawing nearer with every passing day, and the first thing it should stir in you is not a panicked list but overflowing gratitude that you were chosen to reach it at all. It does not ask you for strange new rituals; it asks you to take the ordinary worship you already know and pour your whole heart into it. Its entire purpose is taqwa, and taqwa means plugging the holes in the bucket so that everything you pour in finally stays.

Do not chase the hacks. Chase the heart. Write your to-not-do list before your to-do list. Repair the broken relationship before you repair anything else. Choose deeds you can carry into Shawwal and beyond, because Allah loves what endures. And do not despise the small, quiet, hidden change, because it is often the truest one of all. Enter this month believing, with everything in you, that the One who invited you has already thrown the door of His mercy wide open, and He is waiting for you to walk through it. Prepare now. Prepare your heart. The guest is almost at the door.

☰ Your Action Plan: Prepare the Heart Before Ramadan

Don't just read — choose what you will act on this week. Ramadan rewards the heart that arrived ready, not the one that started scrambling on the first night.

1 Write your to-not-do list first

Before any goals, write down one or two lifestyle sins you commit to leaving for good. Name them honestly, and resolve to root them out. This list is more precious to Allah than any tally of deeds.

TODAY

Make it last: once you begin today, keep it every day after — until it becomes a permanent habit for life.

2 Make one reconciliation call

Pick up the phone or visit the home of someone you are estranged from. Break the standoff, not because you were entirely wrong, but because you want Allah's forgiveness, and He asks you to pardon first.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

3 Choose your one lasting habit

Decide on a single small act of worship you can realistically carry beyond Ramadan, such as two units of night prayer or one page of Qur'an. Start it now so it is already alive when the month begins.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

4 Warm up like the Prophet ﷺ did in Sha'ban

Fix your sleep, restrain your tongue, and open your Qur'an now, before Ramadan opens you. Enter the month with momentum rather than shock.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

🚩 The 7-Day Heart-Preparation Challenge

For the next seven days before Ramadan, do three things each day: say Alhamdulillah out loud the moment you wake for the gift of being alive to reach this month; leave one sin you had grown comfortable with and replace it with a single act of good; and spend two quiet minutes after Fajr simply sitting with Allah, asking Him to keep your heart firm upon His religion. Seven days will not make you perfect, but they will change the heart that meets the new moon. Do not let this end when Ramadan begins. Let it become the way you live long after the month has gone, because the most beloved deeds to Allah are the ones that never stop. And once these days are done, don't let it stop — let it become a lasting habit of the heart, carried for the rest of your life.

Make it stick — and make it last

- ✓ **Write it down.** Put your chosen action on a sticky note on your mirror, desk, or fridge — somewhere you cannot miss it.
- ✓ **Print this plan** and tick each action off as you do it.
- ✓ **Set a daily reminder** on your phone or calendar so it never slips your mind.
- ✓ **Keep a one-line journal** each night — did I do it today? how did it go? — and watch your streak grow.

Don't aim for one good day or week — aim to keep it for life. A habit only counts once it outlives the challenge.