

Sawm and Ramadhan

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SYED ASHRAF ALI

FASTING, or *sawm*, during the sacred month of Ramadhan is obligatory for every adult Muslim, provided that he or she is in full possession of his or her faculties. It is one of the five pillars of Islam. The holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "Islam is built on five pillars: the *shahada* (profession of faith that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah), *salat* (prayers), *zakat* (alms-tax), *sawm* (fast) of Ramadhan and *hajj* (pilgrimage)."

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- When the holy Prophet (pbuh) came to Madinah, he used to fast three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura. Muslims were not required, when they first arrived in Madinah, to fast for more than three days every month. Ibn Abbas reported that the holy Prophet (pbuh) had noticed that the Jews in Madinah observed the fast on the day of Ashoura (the tenth of Muharram). The holy Prophet (pbuh) asked the reason

for it and was told that God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy on this memorable day. Moses (pbuh) therefore observed it as a day of fasting, whereupon the holy Prophet (pbuh) told the Jews: "Moses is closer to me than he is to you." He then observed the day as a fast and instructed the Muslims to fast on that day. He sent out a man to tour Madinah on that day and announce to the Muslims that: "He who had already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day and he who had not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura."

- The second stage begins when Allah, in His infinite Mercy, prescribed the fast of Ramadhan in the second year of the Hegira through the revelation of verses 183 to 187 of Sura Al-Baqara (Chapter II), and the fast on other days was abolished. The holy Prophet (pbuh) said: "The fast of Ramadhan has abolished every other fast." But Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqah (RA) reported that the holy Prophet (pbuh) also said: "Whoever wishes may fast upon it (the day of Ashoura), and whoever wishes may drop it."

- The third stage deals with the period of abstinence and indulgence -- there were times of abstinence during the night as well as during the day. When a man had

said his *isha* prayers, he was supposed to abstain from *mustirat* (i.e. food, drink and sex) after prayers. If a man slept before saying the *isha* prayers he had to abstain when he awoke. The mere saying of *isha salat* and sleep forced a man into a state of abstinence for the rest of the night and the following day until sunset. To provide mankind with the much-needed relaxation from the rigidity and hardship, Rahmanur Rahim revealed the verse: "It is lawful for you on the night of the fast to go unto your wives: they are your garments and you are their garments. Allah knows that you defraud yourselves therein, so He turns towards you and forgives you. So go unto them and seek what Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black thread, then observe the fast till night-fall." (2:187)

Fasting is an ancient form of worship recognised by all previous religions, even the heathen ones. But Islam introduced a new vision, a new idea, a new spirit into the institution of fasting. For the first time in history, fasting was blessed with a systematic regulation, a scientific method, a noble justification. In the days before the holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) fasting meant the suffering of some privation in the hours of mourning and sorrow. Islam introduced a revolutionary innovation and al-Siyam stood not for mere suffering or abstinence but as an exercise for the moral uplift and spiritual elevation of the human soul.

A Muslim fast does not mean mere abstinence from food and drink and sex, or self-torture. The abstinence from the animal instincts for food, drink and sex enables the attention of a man or a woman to be directed to

higher and nobler aspects. Fasting in the light of Islam helps us to overcome lust and thereby sets us on the road leading to perfection -- to be achieved through prayers and penance, *taqwa* and *tarawu'ih*, contemplation, acts of charity, total restraint and abstinence from all evil acts and thoughts. Self-restraint (*taqwa*) is a voluntary effort based on caution, alertness and fear of Allah. Benign Providence Himself loves this glorious and voluntary attempt at self-restraint by His *banda*. In the words of the holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): "By He, in Whose Hands Muhammad's soul rests, Allah prefers the stench of the mouth of he who fasts to the fragrance of musk."

Al-Siyam is indeed a boon, a divine privilege unparalleled by any other act of piety or worship. Abu Huraira (RA) reported Allah's Messenger (pbuh) as saying: "When Ramadhan begins the gates of heaven are opened, the gates of *jahannam* are locked and the devils are chained." (Bukhari and Muslim) Sahl b. Sa'd (RA) reported Rasul Allah (pbuh) as saying: "In paradise there are eight gates, among which is a gate called ar-Rayyan which only those who fast will enter." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Abu Huraira (RA) reported Nabi Kareem (pbuh) as saying: "He who fasts during Ramadhan with faith and seeks his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven; he who prays during the night in Ramadhan with faith and seeks his reward will have his past sins forgiven; and he who passes Lailat al-Qadr in prayer with faith and seeks his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven." (Bukhari and Muslim).

Anas b Malik (RA) told of God's Messenger (pbuh) saying when Ramadhan began: "The month has come to you, and it contains a night which is better than a thousand months. He who is deprived of it is



In anticipation of iftar.

deprived of all good, but only those who are denied prosperity are deprived of it." (Ibn Maja transmitted it)

The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) also said: "The one who fasts has two occasions of joy, one when he breaks his fast and one when he meets his Lord." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Salman al-Farsi (RA) spoke about Allah's Messenger (pbuh) saying: "If someone draws near to God during Ramadhan with some good act he will be like one who fulfills seventy obligatory duties in another month. It is the month of endurance, and the reward of endurance is paradise." (Baihaqi transmitted it).

The holy month of Ramadhan has come once again to teach us that the temporary renunciation of food and drink, sex and greed makes the fulfillment of the dark desires even more pleasant. Let us celebrate it in a befitting way, not through lavish *iftar* par-

ties and expensive dresses (for the ensuing Eid), not through extravagance and prodigality, but through *taqwa* and *tarawu'ih*, *zakat* and *fitra*, self-restraint and benevolence, prayers and penance. No sensible Muslim can afford to miss this opportunity to learn self-restraint, to temper himself in the kiln of *taqwa*, and receive thereby Divine Mercy from the Creator. No one must forget even for a moment the Hadith Qudsi (utterances attributed to Allah outside the Holy Quran) communicated to us by the holy Prophet (pbuh) when he says: "Ever man's work belongs to him. Every (good) deed a son of Adam does will be multiplied, a good deed receiving a tenfold to seven hundredfold reward. Allah has said 'fasting belongs to Me and I repay.'"

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Transformation of English

It appears that the present transformation of the English language is not actually contributing positively towards its enrichment, but is, instead, degrading its standard through introduction of jargon and indecent words.

M ZAHIDUL HAQUE

SOME months back a friend from Mumbai sent me an e-mail written in internet jargon. The mail ended with PCM-BY-TC.

We need to adjust to the changes that are frequently taking place around us. As I had become accustomed to internet mail and chatting English, it wasn't difficult to decode the shortened English expressions my friend's e-mail.

PCM meant "please call me," BY meant "bye" and TC was "take care."

Most people will agree that the English language is undergoing a transformation. Who knows whether, in a couple of years, we will start using English words and sentences in shortened or abbreviated forms as they are now used in cell phones or internet chatting, messaging etc. (e.g. HRU = how are you).

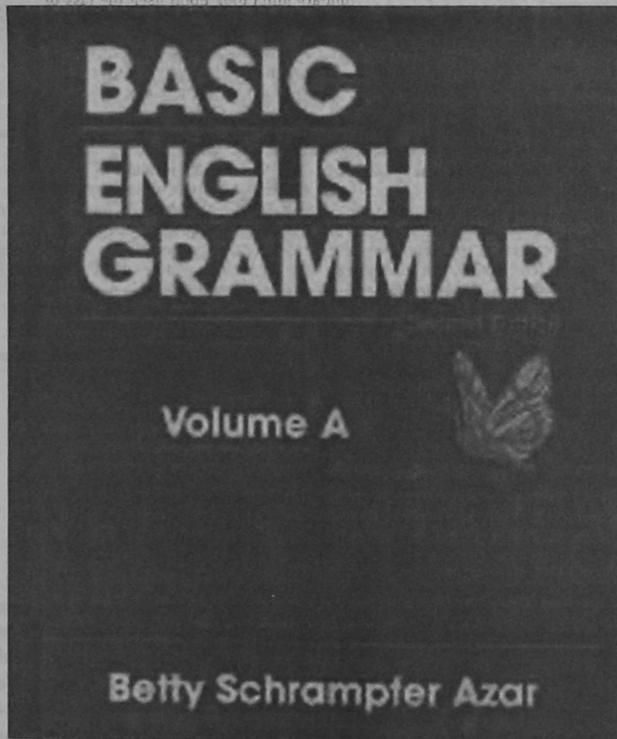
It is, of course, true that the English language has passed through many transformations since the 5th century AD, when its foundation was laid down. According to the history of the development of the English language, it took quite a long time for it to acquire its present

ent form. It passed through four main stages, viz. old English, middle English, early modern English, and modern English.

During the old English period (9th and 10th centuries), English used the Latin alphabet of 26 consonants and vowels. In those days, there were only a few words of general use, like *faeder* (father), *modor* (mother), *brothor* (brother), *sweaster* (sister). There were no articles ("a," "an" or "the"). Hence, "the good man" was written as "se (that) goda mon" and "a good man" as "an (one) goda mon." There were only two tenses -- the present-future and the past with their inflections. Gender was not well-defined, for instance, "sun" was feminine while "moon" was masculine.

The period of the modern English started from 1660. The publication of Samuel Johnson's "Dictionary of the English Language" in 1755 greatly encouraged the growth and development of English literature. English grammarians like Robert Lowth and James Buchanan took a bold step in correcting the English grammar.

In a nutshell, English is a mixture of



DIAT (does it apply today)?

Germanic (old English and Scandinavian), Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, and many other languages. The main feature of modern English is vocabulary, because there are many words that were incorporated into the language during the Industrial Revolution, the British rule over one quarter of the earth, and the two world wars. During the English colonisation of North America, American English took birth with the introduction of some native American words and pronunciations -- for example, "trash" for "rubbish."

With the passage of time, English was elevated to the status of world language, with a rich vocabulary capable of accommodating all the situations of social and technical character. Technological advancement has contributed tremendously to the transformation of English.

Now, in this age of ICT, English is again passing through a transformation to adjust to the modern way of communication. Internet communication through text-messaging, chatting, etc. uses a new type of shortened expressions. For example:-

WRUD (what are you doing?), TTYL (talk to you later), IMS (I am sorry), LOL (laugh out loud), W4Y (waiting for you), etc.

Everyday new English words are being created by different segments of the society. Recently, I came across an interesting word in the Urban Dictionary -- "magic toaster," a derogatory term describing an un-savvy computer user's

view of what a computer is! An example on the usage of this term as cited in the Urban Dictionary is: "Why my magic toaster no come on? I plug in, but no toast."

There are some unscrupulous people who are abusing the language's decent expressions to destroy computer software. Recently, a hacker who calls himself "Life Owner" created and disseminated a computer virus by sending e-mails with the English title "Life if beautiful." It is quite natural that anyone who receives this message will be tempted to open it. And here lies the hacker's success, because the person who opens it will find a message which reads "it is too late now, your life is no longer beautiful." Ultimately, the computer owner will lose everything in his PC while the hacker will gain access to the owner's name, e-mail ID, and password.

It appears that the present transformation of the English language is not actually contributing positively towards its enrichment, but is, instead, degrading its standard through introduction of jargon and indecent words. Perhaps English-speaking people the world over should start thinking about how to retain the originality and rich vocabulary of the English language.

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The Mahatma of Barisal

It was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who bestowed upon him the title of "Mahatma" (great soul), when he (Gandhi) visited him in Barisal, for the great role he played for the social and educational development of Barisal in particular and the country in general. The appellation stuck!

PRADEEP DUTTA

SOME people leave behind footprints in the sands of time, which act like a beacon for generations to come inspiring them for their motherland's intellectual, material and spiritual progress.

One such man of Bangladesh was Babu Aswini Kumar Datta, the great social worker and freedom fighter of Barisal (then known as Bakarganj District) in undivided India, who was born in 1958 in Patuakhali. His ancestral village was in Batajore, also called Harbar, in Gaurnadi Upazila of Barisal District. His family was one of the leading and influential zamindar families of Barisal. He qualified in Bachelor

and Master of arts and, for a brief period, tried law practice at the Barisal district court. But his real passion was social work and philanthropy; therefore, he chose teaching as a career.

He became known for his philanthropy and his part in the nationalist politics. The British government of India announced the partition of Bengal Province on July 7, 1905. This was a policy of Lord Curzon, the then Governor-General of India, who thought that such a drastic step would drive a wedge between Muslims, who were in a majority in East Bengal and Hindus, who were more numerous in the Western part, and thereby emasculate their agitation for a free India from the colonial yoke.

Between July 7 and Oct 16, 1905, when the partition took effect, the whole of Bengal was seething with discontent and protest. His life-long patience with community service endeared him to the local populace. His popularity in the district propelled him into a wider provincial political arena during the anti-partition agitation. Aswini Datta addressed the Bengalis from the Brojo Mohan College compound (which he had founded) calling for continued protest against the vivisection of Bengal; and at Bagerhat, for the first time, he exhorted Indian's to boycott British and foreign merchandise.

He organised volunteers for the freedom movement in Barisal district, which later on spread to the whole of Bengal. In this he had the assistance of three local organisations -- the People's Association (1886); the Bakarganj Hitaisini Sabha (1887) and Netar Sangha -- in all of which he played a pioneering and dominant role. He became a commissioner of Barisal Municipality in 1885, and was vice-chairman in 1888 and chairman in

1897. Keenly committed to community welfare and development, including holistic education, he founded the Brojo Mohan Institution in honour of his father, who was sub-judge in Barisal and later judge in the Munsiff court in Krishnagar, in the year 1884. It was R.C. Dutt, the district magistrate of Barisal, who motivated Aswini Datta to start a college in Barisal town. He endowed 30 acres of land to found the Brojo Mohan College in 1889. It became the foremost educational institution in Barisal, and is still one of the leading education centres, turning out brilliant and intellectual Bangladeshi's who later excelled in multifarious fields of life in Bangladesh as well as overseas.

He taught at the college without remuneration for twenty long years, with loving care for the unfolding of the intellectual, moral and physical attributes of his scholars. He later founded a women's college in Barisal in 1889. He instituted a scholarship scheme for the spread of female education. These educational institutions, of which he was the architect, were venues for

many important conferences and meetings for the freedom of undivided India.

Aswini Babu was actively connected with swadeshi commercial entities like the Swadeshi Bank, Hindustan Cooperative Insurance and Cooperative Navigation Ltd; these institutions helped the people to be self-reliant. Aswini Datta turned Barisal into a strong centre of the swadeshi movement with the aid of swadeshi volunteers under the ambit of "Swadesh Bandhab Samiti" organised for this purpose with himself as the head. As a mouthpiece of this organisation, he was instrumental in bringing out the journal "Barisal Hitaisi." The samiti had over 160 branches in whole of the district. The organisation was banned by the government and Aswini Datta was arrested in Barisal and incarcerated in Lucknow gaol till 1910.

In his home, which is now the Barisal Government College, many eminent Indians like Mahatma Gandhi, poet Rabindranath Tagore, Fazlul Haque (Shere-e-Bangla) and other great men used to discuss the political and social

problems which bedeviled India during the time, under the majestic boughs of the *tomal* tree which is still present in its timeless glory.

The Town Hall in the centre of Barisal town is now known as Aswini Town Hall in memory of this illustrious son of Barisal. It was built with funds from the Khilafat Movement, the Congress party and through donations from leading personalities and businessmen of Barisal district.

He wrote quite a few books -- *Bhaktiyoga*, *Karmayoga*, *Prem Bharatgiti*, etc.

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