



10 Points for Excelling in Ramadan

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My dear brothers and sisters everywhere, *al-salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh*, and Ramaḍān Mubārak to all of you! *Alḥamdulillāh*, I’m honored to be a part of this beautiful program.

My message is very simple and that is to remember that you will never be too ready for the month of Ramaḍān. No matter how much you try and how much you think you have done, Ramaḍān deserves much more, so always remember that you are never too ready for the month of Ramaḍān.

Alḥamdulillāh, Ramaḍān is an annual opportunity to review our goals in life. We adjust our schedules and know we will spend longer hours in the *masājīd* and exhausted during the days. It is an exclusive opportunity for Muslims every year. As Muslims, we always feel that we are under achieving what we should be doing in Ramaḍān, and we all have the feeling that we could have done better and should have done more. At the end of the month, we regret so much of the time we spent wasted. There is always a chance for improvement every single Ramaḍān.

My talk this evening is on the art of excelling in Ramaḍān and how we cannot repeat the same mistakes. Don’t expect me to give you a full program of waking up at such and such time and *suhūr* and *fajr* in the *masjid*. Each person has different responsibilities and circumstances and you can write your own schedule.

I’m going to share with you ten points to help you reach excellence in Ramaḍān. *Inshā’Allāh* I will share with you principles on how to reach success in the month of Ramaḍān.

1. Have the Hunger for Success:

Imām Al-Bukhāri was one day asked about the medicine that would help people memorize, and he said, “I have nothing except for the ardent desire.” If you truly and really have the ardent and burning desire and hunger to succeed, then you will achieve it. The *‘ulemā’* said that whatever expectations you have, you will achieve at least 80%. Imām Al-Bukhāri excelled in that field because he had the ardent desire and hunger for success. Ibn ‘Abbās was a young man when the Prophet (*ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) passed away, but the amount of knowledge he collected made him the top of his field and he was an expert in the interpretation of the Qur’ān. He was once asked, “How were you able to collect all this knowledge in such a short time?” He said, “I had an inquisitive tongue and the heart that comprehends.” He had the ardent desire and didn’t waste his time. Don’t make failure an option in Ramaḍān. Don’t give yourself an exit. Many people start making excuses, and once you give yourself an excuse to fail, you will lose success. Never give yourself that excuse and always have that hunger to succeed.

2. Set Your Goals. Make sure that these goals are very high:

Fear Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*). In order to help us achieve the path of success, he gave us the ultimate goal: to reach *Al-Firdaws Al-A'la*. In many *ayāt*, Allāh says to race and rush. Allāh is helping us set our goals and making our goal *Jannat Al-Firdaws Al-A'la*. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) when he met the *anṣār* at *bayat'l-'aqabah*, The *muhājirīn* asked him, “Ya Rasūlullāh, what do we expect out of this?” The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, “Jannah.” That is the ultimate goal and should be a very high and lofty goal.

When you start Ramaḍān, set your goals as high as you can. If you want to do *khatm'l-Qur'ān*, set a higher goal of two, three, or five. If part of your goals is to achieve righteousness and *taqwa*, then you have to start making plans on how to do so by adding more good deeds to your schedule. If part of your goals is to pray *qiyām'l-layl* every night in the *masjid*, then commit yourself. If you fall short a little from achieving these lofty goals, *inshā'Allāh* they will still be higher than what you did last year.

3. Build Confidence in the Month of Ramaḍān:

Some people come with high expectations for themselves such as finishing the Qur'ān ten times and praying night prayer every night and not missing *takbīrāt'l-iḥrām*. Build confidence that you can achieve these goals. Set a plan and strategy on how to achieve these goals and build confidence that you can do that. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn Al-'As was a young man at the time of the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam). He used to finish the Qur'ān every single night, and the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) was surprised. He (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) came to him and told him it was a righteous and good deed, but he should recite the Qur'ān in one month (this is besides Ramaḍān, by the way, and Ramaḍān is a special occasion when you can do more). He (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, “Try to finish the Qur'ān once every month.” He said, “Ya Rasūlullāh, I can achieve more than this.” The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, “Do it in one week.” He said, “Ya Rasūlullāh, I can achieve more than this.” The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, “Do it in every three days.” He said, “Ya Rasūlullāh, I can achieve more than this.” The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, “There is nothing better than this.” If it is done more often than three nights, then it may be rushed and you will not benefit a lot. This *ḥadīth* applies outside of Ramaḍān, and in Ramaḍān you can do more.

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās (*radhi Allāhu 'anhu*) after the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) passed away was still a teenager. He had an *anṣārī* companion he would seek knowledge with. His companion said, “This is going to be a far journey. Who is going to waste his time and come listen to someone like you?” 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās said, “I left him and continued my journey seeking knowledge.” Eventually, he became the great scholar we all know. His friend later saw hundreds of people at the *masjid* and said, “That young man was much smarter than me and knew that one day this would happen.” Have the confidence that you will achieve your goals and have a strategy and plan.

4. Do What You Love to Do in Ramaḍān:

There are so many good deeds that you can do. Some people love to feed the poor and cook food and give to others. Others invite a lot of people to their house or take food to the *masjid*. Other people love to read the Qur'ān a lot and dedicate more time. Other people love to do



ṣalāh and *qiyām'l-layl*. Some people love spending more time in the *maṣjid* and others love to spend more time in seclusion. Some people push themselves so hard in what is not what they enjoy in acts of *'ibādāt* and may force themselves to read the Qur'ān more and are too exhausted to do *adḥkār* or *tarawīḥ*, and this is not a smart plan. Do what you really love to do. Choose and select the good deeds you enjoy doing and increase them more and more. Make your plan around these deeds that you love and enjoy doing. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) recommended us to achieve that which is little but continuous. Many people love to start Ramaḍān with as many good deeds as they can, which may be too much. Take it easy and start with what you enjoy. As you build momentum, add more. The whole point is to be proactive, so start your plan and choose the good deeds you enjoy and start working on it.

5. Study the Successful & Learn From the Best:

Experts in the field of success teach this to people. Why is our *'ibādah* less when it comes to studying from the experts and learning from the best and successful? What do we mean by this? The *'ulemā'* say, "Stories at tales are like the gems of Paradise." When you hear a story, you enjoy it so much because you can relate to it. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) says, "We sent you the best of stories..." At the end of the story of Yūsuf, Allāh said, "There is in the stories instructions for men of understanding." When you learn from the successful and from the best, it will encourage you and raise your morale. Achieving all of these great goals has been done by the people before you.

The *ṣaḥābah* were the best examples after the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam). Check the stories of the successful in Ramaḍān – How did they succeed? What did they do? Read some of the biographies of the people and the great scholars and how they spent their time in Ramaḍān.

Remember, keep these stories with you throughout the month of Ramaḍān, and when you feel weaker and weaker, go back to the stories and remind yourself.

6. Be in the Company of the Successful Ones:

The previous point was about people you learn about in history: the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam), the *ṣaḥābah*. Many people say that this is theoretical. Look for people around you in your own community who can help you achieve these lofty goals. You will definitely find one or two people around you. You should go and look for those people. Remember that your companions in Ramaḍān can help you go higher in goals or can pull you down. Habits are contagious. Look for high achievers in the month of Ramaḍān. If you always associate yourself with high achievers, *bi'idhnillāh* you will go higher in your goals. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "The example of the good and bad companion is the example of the one who sells perfume and the blacksmith. He may give you something good for free or you may buy something, but at least you will get a nice smell from him. The blacksmith will blow smoke and he may burn your clothes or at least you will smell something bad." The same is with those you associate with during Ramaḍān. Are you going to associate with those who will encourage you to watch TV or play cards? Or will you associate with those who will help you go higher? Look for those who are high achievers and associate with them throughout the month of Ramaḍān as much as you can.



7. Go All Out & Work Hard:

When you set your goals, don't just set them to achieve them at your convenience or when you have spare time. If you are serious about achieving these goals, make them a priority. Go all out to achieve these goals. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) reminded the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam): When he (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would go out for *da'wah* he would invite as many as he could. No one can achieve more than the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam), but when he came home, you would expect him to take rest, but the instruction that came from Allāh was the opposite. Allāh told him: "When you are done, put yourself in worship and 'ibādah until you get tired." The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) always maintained *qiyām'l-layl* every single night. With all of the work he did during the day, he did more at night to get to the next level.

People who go to the gym know that once they have achieved the ten reps, they have to add one more. They are excited that they have passed their regular achievement.

Put priorities during the day and night. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) is reminding us all the time how to move on from one level to the next. One time the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "There is one night that is *laylat'l-qadr* which is better than the worship of 1,000 months." The *ṣaḥābah* were worshipping in the hope of achieving this night. Then the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) told them to look for it in the last ten nights. The *ṣaḥābah* became more focused. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) instructed them that the night is in the last ten nights of Ramaḍān. Some of them became tired and a little lazy, and to help them achieve more, the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) told them it was in the odd number of the last ten nights. They would then focus on five nights. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said it may be the 27th, 25th, or 23rd. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) sees the momentum going down and helped them become more focused. Go all out and work so hard. It happens only once a year. Only Allāh knows if you will even survive today. Make this coming Ramaḍān the best Ramaḍān by being more focused and put so much effort in achieving better goals.

8. Be Prepared & Adaptable:

Be prepared to change your schedule. Many people are effective the first few days but then feel that they are losing it and then lose momentum completely and say they can't do it. Instead of slightly changing their schedule, they try to start over with a completely new schedule and then they quit. Expect yourself to change plans. It may not be a dramatic change, but you need to adapt. It is better for you than completely quitting the program over and over again.

The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) started his days with plans and changed them. One time he entered the house of one of his wives and asked if there was any food, and if there wasn't, then he would say he would fast. He could have gone out and looked for food somewhere else, but he took the opportunity to fast.

Never put your programs back to back and make them so crowded. When there is an emergency, the whole program will be broken up. Expect yourself to do some changes, which will make it less stressful for you. If you start reading five juz every single night and then



realize that they are too much and then decrease to three juz and then you are short two juz. As you try to make up and do seven, you start to lose hope. Expect yourself to adapt and change. Do something reasonable every single night like reading three juz and move on with your schedule. Don't simply cancel the good deeds you have started just because you think you are falling behind.

You may fall sick or have an emergency to travel or relatives may come to visit. Expect to change some of your plans.

9. Remind Yourself of the Virtue of What You are Doing:

Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'āla*) says in the Qur'ān: "Reminders benefit the believers." During the month of Ramaḍān, you are going to feel a little tired and exhausted. Go to someone who you think can help you remind yourself. Ask them for advice. Remind yourself by spending a few minutes each night in *dhikr* and *du'ā'*. Read about the virtues of fasting every now and then. For many people it becomes a cliché, but the reminder definitely benefits the believers. Keep *Riyadh Al-Saaliheen* handy and the *aḥadīth* about the virtues of Ramaḍān handy. Hopefully it will rejuvenate your spirit. If that doesn't work, then have someone else give you advice. If that doesn't help, attend a program in the *masjid*. Revisit your goals.

10. Never Give Up!

If the *Shayṭān* wants anything from us, it is for us to give up on ourselves. The Shaytan whispers that you can't do it and that you aren't the person to achieve the good deeds and you give up on doing them. How many times have you vowed after Ramaḍān to wake up for *qiyām'l-layl* after Ramaḍān and you never achieve it? How many times have you wanted to fast Mondays and Thursdays after Ramaḍān? Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'āla*) says in *Sūrah Yūsuf*: "Never give up hope of Allāh's Mercy. Truly no one despairs of Allāh's Mercy except those who have no faith." Never cancel your plans in the month of Ramaḍān simply because you fell a little short or a little weak. Even until your last breath and last seconds in this world, you are required and asked to do something that is good. In the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad, the Prophet (*ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said in a *ḥadīth* of Anas: "If the Day of Judgment is established and you have a plant in your hand, if you are able to put it in the earth before the Day of Judgment completely starts, then do it." With Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'āla*), you will benefit. Even if it is the last second of the month of Ramaḍān. What were you doing last year? People were getting ready to finish and prepare for Eid. It is one of the blessed moments. Focus on *du'ā'* and *dhikr* and give charity. Once Ramaḍān is over, what was multiplied in Ramaḍān will no longer be multiplied. Never give up even if you fall short and behind. Continue doing good deeds until the end of the month, even if it is the last night. Even if it is the last hour and you still haven't finished *khatm'l-Qur'ān*, still continue reading. Falling short one juz is better than falling short 15 juz. Remember that you are dealing with Allāh, and Allāh is the One who rewards. With Allāh, it is absolutely worth every effort that you are doing.

Recap:

It is never too late to prepare for Ramaḍān. You will never be too ready for the month. Plant some principles in your mind and heart so that you have something to achieve. Have the hunger of success. Have the ardent desire to succeed in Ramaḍān. Do you have that or do you think that you are not a strong achiever? Expect to succeed more *inshā'Allāh* and have a hunger for success.



Set your goals very high. Allāh has set your goals higher than you can imagine and is helping you set your goals high. Go and try to achieve these goals. Build confidence that you can achieve these goals. Don't beat yourself down. If you fail once, it does not mean you are a failure.

Do what you love in Ramaḍān. You may not be able to achieve anything, but start by achieving that which you like. If you like giving charity, then give more. If you like to read the Qur'ān or spend more time in the *masjid*, do what you love the most.

Study the successful and learn from the best. Read the stories of the *ṣaḥābah* and the Prophet (*ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*) and how much they achieved in Ramaḍān. Learn from them and learn their techniques.

Be in the company of the successful ones. Associate yourself with good company. Pick one or two people who are high achievers. Habits are contagious. If you associate yourself with low achievers, most likely that is what you will achieve.

Go all out and work so hard. It is once in perhaps your lifetime. It could be your last Ramaḍān. Only Allāh knows. Make this opportunity like your first and last opportunity. You will definitely do your best and put every single effort to make it successful, particularly in the last ten nights.

Be adaptable and expect changes in plans. As you try to achieve your plans, some emergencies may come up, but it doesn't mean you should quit. Adapt and move on based on the new change. Never cancel the schedule or program.

Remind yourself of the virtue of what you are doing. Keep handy the books on the virtues of fasting. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) says in a *ḥadīth qudsi*: "All the good deeds of the son of Adam are for himself except for fasting which is exclusively for Me, and I shall reward for it." If you know that Allāh is giving the reward, you know that it will be beyond your imagination.

Never ever give up, even if it is the last hour in the month of Ramaḍān. Make sure to use it wisely.

These are ten points on how you can excel in the month of Ramaḍān *inshā'Allāh*. I wish all of you a successful Ramaḍān this year and ask Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) to make this Ramaḍān the best Ramaḍān for all of you. I ask Allāh to help us all to live to this Ramaḍān, to make the fasts our best fasts, and the *qiyām* our best *qiyām* and to help us become more generous in the month of Ramaḍān. I ask Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) to help us all achieve some of the *i'tikāf* during the last few nights of Ramaḍān. I ask Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) to help us be of those who will survive and live and worship Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) on *laylat'l-qadr*. I ask Allāh to make us among those who will learn beneficial knowledge and benefit others.

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