

Fast 1: Fasting

- The Holy Quran says:

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you **as it was prescribed for those before you**, so that you may guard against evil.” (2:183)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ
الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

- Thanks be to Allah for granting us to see another month of Ramadan. The underlying theme of the Studies in 2017 will be **Human Values and Islam**. The above verse about fasting describes it as a practice and a form of devotion in the religions before Islam, and thus it is a human practice.
- A “human value” is a value recognised by human beings generally as essential to good and civilized behaviour, and important for moral development. Such values were also taught by religions before Islam. Examples are truth, justice and charity.
- Question: In carrying out a duty required by religion, can we breach a broader human value? For example, is a person entitled to tell a lie, or (more seriously) commit murder, on behalf of and in support of his religion?
- According to the Quran, human values exist because they are a part of the human nature possessed by every human being. The role of religion is to strengthen man to adhere to those values and not to deviate from them:

“Certainly We created man in the best make. Then We reduce him to the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good; so theirs is a reward never to be cut off.” (95:4–6)

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ﴿١﴾
ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ
مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٣﴾

Man is created with the highest potential, yet he often acts in the worst possible manner, against his true nature. So revelation from God comes to enable him to develop that potential. If he accepts it (“believe”) and acts on it practically (“do good”) then he becomes again what a human being ought to be.

- Elsewhere it is stated:

“And surely We have honoured the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We provide them with good things, and We have made them to excel highly most of those whom We have created.” (17:70)

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٧٠﴾

The providing of good things to human beings for their material well-being, which they access by travelling all over the earth, is an indication that “good things” have also been provided in the form of moral and spiritual guidance. This is because being “honoured” cannot mean being provided with physical necessities only. A few verses earlier it is mentioned in the story of Adam’s creation:

“And when We said to the angels: Be submissive to Adam, they submitted, but not Iblīs (the devil). He said: Shall I submit to him whom You have created of dust? Do You see, this is he whom You have **honoured** above me!” (17:61–62)

Man is also honoured by being placed above the control of the devil. That is where his real honour lies. While man may feel helpless against the attacks of the devil to incite him to do wrong, Allah here in the Quran goes on to tell the devil:

“My servants — you have surely no authority over them.” (17:65)

By “My servants” are meant all human beings.

- In fact, the very first command in the Quran, in chapter 2, is addressed to all human beings (*an-nās*):

“O people, serve your Lord Who created you and those before you, so that you may guard against evil,” (2:21)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

All human beings, before or after the message of Islam came into the world, are equally the creation of God. By “serving” Him, which means acquiring His attributes on the human scale, they can strengthen and develop themselves to avoid acts of wrongdoing. When Muslims serve God by following the teachings of Islam, it is an obligation on them *in their capacity as human beings*, not just in their capacity as being Muslims. For example, we pray, not just because we are Muslims but also because we are human beings, fulfilling a human need.