

These verses of the Quran therefore reverse that order of shortsighted calculation. Giving charity opens the door to ease in social existence, in addition to opening up chambers of the human soul not accessible without sacrificing one's own immediate interest – though charity is without doubt also in one's worldly interest. The path of miserliness or of denying anything but material calculations, although, perhaps, easy on the surface, is ultimately the path of difficulty, pain, and regret. Human reason well attests to this, and recorded history will never let us dodge its truth or forget it.

One cannot help but realize the profound and palpable truth of God's words that accompany the command of fasting – God intends for you ease, and does not intend for you hardship. Its meaning resonates in the human soul with such a ring of truth and flash of light as to enable one to glimpse a pattern of factual pathways that connect to a whole raft of "eases" which come to us simply as a result of fasting. First and foremost, fasting in Ramadan is a celebration of the Quran whose guidance it enables us to ponder more deeply, even as it frees our souls from the tentacles of so many of our passions.

Follow this: By fasting Ramadan we come to know, for instance, the ease of concentrated reflection on divine revelation, which, in turn, leads to the ease of knowing how to follow the straight path to a successful worldly and eternal life back to God – which gives way to yet another ease: That of systematically avoiding problem-fraught choices, which, in line, enormously reduces countless stresses of life: a reduction further augmented by learning, truly, how to trust in Allah, which the sustained reflection on the Quran that Ramadan affords additionally bequeaths, and which, as we noted, is now thrice enhanced in a fasting state. The combination of each one of these aforementioned "eases" – ease unto the Quran, ease as a result of the enlightenment sustained reflection on it gives us, the ease of good decision-making based upon its divine guidance and the stress reduction we enjoy as a result, and finally the trebling of that enlightenment as fasting suppresses our passions – all of these give way to an additional ease, which adds immense and real value to the quality of our lives, namely: The ease of minimizing or dropping contentiousness between ourselves, individually,

and all others because of the self-control, divine illumination, and higher fear of God we are enjoying as a result of the multiple eases bequeathed to us by fasting.

This latter improvement in our character (giving up contentiousness), of course, immediately comes to a staggering enrichment in the form of all our personal relationships, and particularly our closest ones, with husband or wife, son and daughter, mother and father, friends, neighbours. Now, there can be no doubt that when our personal relationships become positive, our happiness quotient soars, and we ourselves become incalculably more productive – which only further elevates our happiness. In such a state – that of high contentment – it is the most natural human response to become concerned about welfare of all those around, in concentric waves beginning with those nearest you and moving out, without limit, into the world.

This renewal of love in relationships, of a necessity, increases our own, and very personal, sense of self-worth and purpose, which brings about a crucial refinement: Understanding our larger human mission. Moreover, it has the effect of surrounding us with positive people of ease and latitude, motivated to help us and others around them, again in concentric waves ever outward, in the accomplishment of that human mission. This sense of togetherness creates a broadening atmosphere of support and help, which engenders—in you, and in others who now feel safe from you – evermore security in one's life and environment – a tremendous source of anxiety unexpectedly turned into an even greater fount of ease. Suddenly, we have gone from simple, circumscribed, highly doable act of very modest privation – fasting – to a global cascade of ease.

And all the while, one is accruing evermore reward and ever higher approval in the pleasure God, which inures to one's ultimate benefit and hope for felicity in the everlasting Garden Hereafter. One could almost endlessly detail the connections of an infinitely elaborate latticework of how the Fasting—which God has specifically intended to cause our own ease to proliferate – will inevitably result, utterly miraculously and exponentially, in precisely this state of contentment, provided we give it its due right. Put another way, fasting necessarily leads to the mitigation of hardship in human life.

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# Ease

## The Elaborate Latticework

The practice of the Companions of the Prophet (p) shows that they were concerned less with the minutiae of Law and more with the welfare of the people and their connection with their Lord. With the "development" and "sophistication" of jurisprudence, this natural attitude of ease and practical rationality **was replaced** by emphasis on technical legal knowledge and strict hierarchies and schools of jurists. It is the essential quality of the Islamic tradition's self-reforming nature to recover this religion's natural attitude of ease over difficult practices.

**G**od's Law is ultimately designed without any arbitrariness to attain the ultimate welfare and felicity of humans in both worlds, this one and the eternal life to come. That obedience to divine decree will attain happiness in the Afterlife is self-evident, but Quranic verses, as well as the detailed analysis of Islamic Law confirm that human happiness in this life is just as much the concern of Islamic Law. Therefore, in the domain of the Law, the consideration of human interest in accordance with God's pleasure, is the most paramount concern.

When we learn so persistently in Islam that God wishes for us ease and Islam is the religion of ease, a question must occur to us. Why is it hard and challenging to follow Islam – which requires, at times, great sacrifices of one's desires, wealth, and even self – if it is supposed to be natural and easy?

Ease in Islam does **not** mean that following Islam requires no effort, but that it is natural – in perfect accordance with the nature upon which God has created humans. It is human nature to develop, grow and prosper through challenges and difficulties as much as through Allah's blessings. It is of the essence of who we are as a creature to be spurred by loss as much as by gain, and to improve and advance through discipline and challenge. It is the most fundamental drive in the divinely ordained human nature to seek excellence, and, indeed, perfection, just as it is part of human nature to seek happiness, one immediate physical form of which is comfort and convenience.

Any system of conduct that does not set high our moral aspirations even as it challenges us to be better by disciplining our souls is unfit and unworthy. Some modern philosophies such as existentialism and nihilism are the lowest state of humanity in that respect, for rarely have humans justified such aimless and decadent lives as these philosophies do. Only a tiny but influential minority clings to such ideas. The vast majority of people yearn for meaningful lives for God.

We know well by experience that to constantly seek instant gratification can be the most

disastrous and uneasy path. Parents, for instance, who do not discipline their children might be taking the easy path in the short run, but we all know that such parents as well as their children are going to face the difficult consequences of their laziness and neglect all too soon. The natural path is not to merely satisfy the impulses of the moment or the physical body, but to take into account what is best in the long-term and short-term future, as well as the requirements of the body, mind, and soul.

Ease of Islam, therefore, is not the “path of least resistance”— which cannot guarantee any sort of happiness, ultimate or otherwise. Rather, ease in Islam is the path of “least unnecessary difficulty” to quickest end of genuine good and gladness for one and all and ultimate happiness. God provides us, through His commandments, the perfectly crafted way of life, which is in consonance with all of the aspects, requirements, and drives of human nature.

The interpretation of God's commands is challenging and compound. But that too is part of the challenge for the human mind and soul which they need in order to grow – and, indeed, part of the sense of fulfillment and accomplishment by which Allah rewards His people. What God has commanded are all elemental aspects that make up the parts of the unified yet broad natural path – the wide path of ease – to which He has guided us.

This theme of difficulty in what seems easy, and ease in what is apparently difficulty is clearly stated in the Quran. (al-Layl:92):

By the Night as it conceals;  
By the Day as it appears in glory;  
By the creation of male and female;  
Verily, the ends you strive for are diverse.  
So the one who gives in charity and fears Allah,  
And believes in goodness,  
Surely We shall ease their way unto the state of ease.  
But the one who is a greedy miser  
and thinks himself self-sufficient,  
And disbelieves in goodness,  
Surely We shall ease their way unto adversity.

These verses force us to think against the backdrop of nature—night and day, male and female—as well as taking into account the nature of the human – the

empirical fact that people all seem to seek different goals, and that despite all the diversity, there are ultimately two types of paths they follow: That of ease or that of adversity and dis-ease. The path of ease is marked by giving in charity and being mindful of God, while that of discomfort and adversity is marked by unbelief and covetousness.

Now, by the standards of short-sighted, material calculation, we see three things: (1) To give is harder than to hoard, (2) to believe in the Unseen God appears harder than to deny anything beyond the perceptible, and (3) to believe in goodness (and hence to accept the responsibility of right conduct for oneself) appears harder than to deny any basis of goodness and to act in sheer self-interest.

In godless cultures of all times, no less than those of our own day, all of these deceptive “paths of ease” have, indeed, been glorified and preferred. Capitalism today valorizes hoarding and consuming endlessly rather than giving. Materialist philosophies encourage the existentialist attitude of believing in nothing, that, hence, considers no goals and values as worth adhering to, except for mere existence and perusal of self-interest.

But these considerations of short-sighted self-interest are like those of an infant who impulsively wishes to hold a burning coal in its hand. To exercise some self-control and stay away from the fire would allow that infant to have the visual pleasure and warmth that the burning coal affords. Of course, this requires knowledge, and such is the key in all of this.

Experience has taught us to stay away from the fire, so that it has become our beneficial servant and not a cruel master. Proper knowledge and self-discipline allow us to make it easy and comfortable for us to live with fire and not make the mistake that an infant would. Similarly, Islam is the divine path of ease that makes this life easy by guiding us along the path that makes the many fires of human passion our beneficial servants, not our cruel masters.

God intends for you

**Ease**

and does **not** intend for you

**Hardship**