

## 17) Piety And Fasting

One of the other religious obligations which require ‘Taqwa’ in practice and have no worth without Taqwa is ‘Fasting’.

Fasting is sometimes interpreted as the ‘purification of body’, as a shield of one who observes it in this world and the hereafter; at least a shield against fire and at other times as an act which makes Satan ashamed. In a tradition, it has been described as a booty easily gained and as Jihad, and in other traditions, it is considered as one of the signs of faith.

The sleeping of a fasting one is considered as worshipping, his breathing as glorification of Allah, the smell of his mouth is better than musk, his silence as glorification of Allah, his deed is twice rewarded, and finally the reward of his fasting shall be (greatly) from God.”<sup>1</sup>

Fasting is an obligatory religious duty and anyone who intentionally leaves it without any excuse has to fast for sixty days, to feed sixty poor men, or manumit a slave as penance. Denying it, he will be considered as an unbeliever. If he is a Muslim, he will be considered as apostate.

The order related to apostasy is mentioned in the books of practical rulings of Islam (Risalah Amaliyyah) as follows: if one is a man, his property will be taken away. If he is married, he has to divorce his (Muslim) wife and he must be sentenced to death. If one is a woman, she will be sentenced to life imprisonment.

Fasting has been repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Quran. One of these verses recites: **“O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil).”**<sup>2</sup>

In another verse, we read: **“O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer; Surely, Allah is with the patient (fasting ones).”**<sup>3</sup>

Another Quranic verse recites: **“Surely, the men who submit (to Allah) and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the**

***humble men and the humble women, and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember, Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.***”[4](#)

Fasting can be viewed from different angles and each aspect can be elaborated:

- a. The essence of fasting which is our present topic and we have to briefly discuss it.
- b. Kinds of fasting; obligatory, praiseworthy, blameworthy, and unlawful.
- c. The rules of fasting; abstaining from eating and drinking, breaking the fast, timing of fasting and eating, taking a trip and being at home, being sick and healthy.
- d. The ruling of the holy month of Ramadan and its importance are separate topics. That is to say if a person cannot fast, he must have a legal excuse; either to be very old man or very old woman, sick or on trip, under the legal age of maturity, or to break his/her fasting reluctantly. Yet such one is susceptible to benefit from the blessings of the holy month of Ramadan, for the blessings of Ramadan may include non-fasting people too.

Some people have the impression that since they cannot fast, they are deprived of the blessings of this month, whereas if we do not say that all the blessings of this holy month may include them, we can say that they shall enjoy most of its blessings. For example, they can enjoy the blessing of the Night of Ordainment (the night of al-Qadr), or reciting the holy Quran that each verse of which has the reward of reciting the holy Quran from the beginning to the end, or the act of repentance during this holy month.

If one has no excuse for not fasting and he intentionally refrains from fasting, he will be the most wretched one. Hence, those blessings will not be true to him. But if he cannot fast due to travel and old age, reciting the holy Quran during the month of Ramadan is as rewardable as fasting itself is. Therefore, is the month of Ramadan not a source of blessing and forgiveness for such one? The answer is certainly ‘yes’.

For example, the duties mentioned by the holy prophet (SAW) in the Sha’baniyyah Supplication (Du’a) have nothing to do with fasting. Hence, the sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan and our obligations in that month should not be mixed with the worth of fasting and our duties toward it. Here, we would like to talk about the essence and truth of fasting and its quality, and not about the worth and significance of the holy month of Ramadan or our duties in it.

Fasting is one of the ways by which human beings seek nearness to God exactly like the offering of prayer. By fasting, man can build his character, keep away from vices, be adorned with virtues, and save himself from the fire of Hell. By fasting, man can keep away from Satan and seek God’s assistance. By fasting, man can rectify his instincts, overcome his passions, awaken his humane emotions, strengthen

his patience and endurance, reach his ultimate goal.

But what kind of fasting does have such worth and significance? Does fasting mean to abstain from eating and drinking only, or it has a more comprehensive and perfect meaning? We would better get the answer from the holy prophet of Islam (SAW) who has said: “There are many fasting people who get nothing from fasting other than hunger and thirst. There are also many who keep vigil but get nothing from spending the night awake except sleeplessness.”[5](#)

The holy prophet (SAW) has also been reported as saying: “One who is fasting, but looks at a woman lustfully invalidates his fasting.”[6](#)

Imam Reza (AS) has been reported as having said: “Whenever you are fasting, your ears, eyes, skin, and hair must be fasting too. You have to observe piety even in kissing and sleeping (with your womwn) while being fasting.”[7](#)

True traditions say: “...the day you are fasting should not be like the day you are not fasting.”[8](#)

Imam Sadiq (AS) has been reported as saying: “Fasting is not solely to abstain from eating and drinking. There are certain conditions to observe so that your fasting be valid. That is the inward fasting. Have you not heard what the daughter of Imran, Virgin Mary (AS) has said? **“Surely I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent God, so I shall not speak to any human being today.”**[9](#) It means ‘silence’.

Therefore, whenever you fast, keep your tongue from telling lies, lower your eyes (not to look lustfully at persons who it is unlawful to look at), do not quarrel with others, do not envy, do not dispute, do not challenge others, do not get angry, do not backbite, do not abuse anyone, do not talk badly, do not be lazy, do not bother others, do not oppress, do not be wasteful, do not torture anyone, and do not ignore the remembrance of God and prayer.

Keep silent, be patient, be truthful, and wait for what God has promised you while you are hopeful of meeting Him.

It is incumbent on you to be tranquil, humble, grave, and submissive as a servant afraid of his master, or like hopeful ones, who have purified their hearts from vices and observe openly and secretly what God has forbidden. Entrust yourselves completely to God while you are fasting. It is only then that you have observed fasting for the sake of God and have fulfilled your duties. If you fail to observe what has been ordained for you, it will be reduced from the reward of your fast. The holy prophet (SAW) heard a women curse her female slave. The messenger of Allah (SAW) ordered food to be brought before the woman and asked her to eat. She said: “I am fasting, O messenger of Allah!” The holy prophet said: “How are you fasting while you are cursing your female slave? Surely, fasting does not just mean to abstain from eating or drinking. It means refraining from bad deeds and bad speech too. There are few people who are truly fasting but many who are hungry.”[10](#)

In fact, fasting is not to abstain from eating and drinking alone, but, according to moralists, fasting is classified into three categories; ordinary, special, and very special fasting.

Ordinary fasting is the one which prevents you from eating and drinking. Its virtue is to rid you from chastisement.

Special fasting is to keep the eyes, the ears, the tongue, and the body away from sins in addition to abstinence from eating and drinking. There are many rewards for this kind of fasting.

Very special fasting is to keep the heart and the mind away from all worldly affairs and dishonesty. To fully obey God and deny whatever other than Him, besides abstaining from eating and drinking, is the fasting of the prophets, the saints, and those who are close to God. "The result of such fasting is what eyes have not seen, ears have not heard of, and the attainment of what occurs to just few people."<sup>11</sup>

In the end, it is well to draw the attention of readers to an interesting story. Zeinab, a niece of Nafeesah, a granddaughter of Imam Hasan (AS) narrates: "I used to be in the service of my aunt for forty years. During this time, I never saw her sleep during nights, or not fasting during days. Whenever I said to her, "Why are you causing yourself so much trouble?", she would say, "How can I get along easily with my 'self' while there are hard ways ahead and no one can pass through them except the true believers?" She had had a grave dug in her own house in which she would offer prayer (recommended prayers that can offered in any condition). She had recited the holy Quran six thousand times therein, and when she was to depart from this world, she was fasting. Whenever she was asked to break her fast, she would say: "How strange! I have been asking God for the past thirty years to meet Him while I am fasting. How can I act contrary to my wish? I cannot possibly do it!" She started reciting the Quranic chapter of al-An'am and when she reached this verse ***"They shall have the abode of peace with their Lord"***,<sup>12</sup> she passed away.

Would you ponder on how such people are in their understanding of the Lord, prayer, fasting, the Quran, charity, and piety, and how we are?!

Her husband, Isshaq al-Mo'taman son of Imam Sadiq (a.s.), intended to take her body to Medina to be buried in the Baqee' cemetery. The Egyptians gathered and did not allow him to do that. There was a quarrel between them until the man saw the holy prophet (SAW) in his dream, saying: "O Issaq! Do not oppose the Egyptians. Let them be blessed with her holy body."

Surely, anyone who has such features shall be blessed during his\her life and in his\her death. She worshiped God for years. She had devoted herself completely to her Lord. She recited the holy Quran all her life. She had helped the poor with her wealth. She had performed the hajj to the Kaaba on foot for thirty times. The water of her ablution had made a blind Jewish girl be able to see, and the Egyptians were blessed with her holy tomb.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 93, pp. 246,259.

- [2.](#) Qur'an, 2:183.
- [3.](#) Qur'an, 2:153.
- [4.](#) Qur'an, 33:35.
- [5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 99, p. 289.
- [6.](#) Ibid., p. 290.
- [7.](#) Ibid., vol. 93, p. 291.
- [8.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 93, p. 292.
- [9.](#) Qur'an, 19:26.
- [10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 93, p. 292.
- [11.](#) Jami' al-Sa'adaat, p. 619.
- [12.](#) Qur'an, 6:127.
- [13.](#) Safeenat al-Bihar, vol. 2, p. 606.

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