

Optional Fast

Islam encourages the faithful to fast during other months. The author of *Thawab al-A'mal* traces the *isnad* of one tradition of the Holy Prophet (S) to Ibn 'Abbas who cites the Prophet (S) saying, "Whoever fasts three days during the month of Sha'ban will be elevated seventy thousand degrees in Paradise of jewels and diamonds, and whoever fasts nineteen days during the month of Sha'ban will be granted seventy thousand mansions of jewels and diamonds in Paradise. And whoever fasts twenty-two days of the month of Sha'ban will be clothed with seventy outfits of silk and silk brocades."

How do the faithful earn mansions in Paradise and marry those lovely *huris* besides fasting?

The Messenger of Allah (S) is quoted on p. 177, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al-Anwar* saying, "When I entered Paradise during my ascension trip (*israa*), I saw angels building mansions, using one brick of gold and another of silver. From time to time they would stop. 'Why do you stop?' I asked them. 'We stop till we get paid,' they answered. I asked them, 'How do you get paid?' 'We get paid,' they answered, 'when the believer (for whom we are building this mansion) says: *Subhan-Allah wal-Hamdu Lillah wa Allahu Akbar* (Glory to Allah; all Praise is due to Allah, and Allah is Great)."

Types of optional fast are recorded and explained in detail in Vol. 94 of al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar*; refer to this valuable reference for the number of pages, as well as the *isnad*, of the traditions cited in the following paragraphs which deal with other types of fast:

1) Fast of Eid al-Ghadir

One who fasts during the 18th of Thul-Hijjah will be regarded as though he had fasted sixty months. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) has quoted his forefathers (as) citing the Messenger of Allah (S) saying about Eid al-Ghadir, "The Day (Eid) of the Ghadir is the greatest of my nation's Eids; it is the Day on which Allah, the Most Exalted One, ordered me to nominate my brother Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) as the leader of my nation so that they may through him receive guidance after me, and it is the Day when Allah perfected the (Islamic) creed and completed the blessing upon my nation and accepted Islam as their religion." This tradition is also stated in al-Saduq's *Amali*. Abu Abdullah Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) is

quoted on p. 32, Vol. 2, of *Al-Khisa*, as having said, "Eid al-Ghadir is the greatest Eid; it is the 18th of Thul-Hijjah, and it was a Friday."

On p. 126, Vol. 2, of *Al-Khisa*, it is stated that Ibn Musa quotes al-Asdi citing al-Husayn ibn 'Ubaydullah al-Ash'ari quoting al-Yaqtini quoting al-Qasim quoting his grandfather quoting al-Mufaddal saying, "I asked Abu Abdullah (as): 'How many Eids do Muslims have?' He (as) said, 'Four.' I said, 'I know of two Eids (al-Fitr and al-Adha) and Friday...' He said to me, 'The greatest and the most honored of all of them is the 18th of Thul-Hijjah, which is the day when the Messenger of Allah (S) installed the Commander of the Faithful (as) as the people's highest authority (after him).' I asked him, 'What should we do on that Day?' He (as) said, 'You ought to fast during it to thank and praise Allah, though He ought to be thanked all the time. The Prophets had required their *wasis* to fast on the day when the latter are nominated as their successors and to consider it as an Eid. Whoever fasts during it will be regarded as having done so in sixty years."

2) Fast of Eid Miladun-Nabi (S)

Al-Karajki's *Kanz* indicates that anyone who fasts the 17th of Rabi' al-Awwal, when the Prophet (S) was born, will be regarded as though he had fasted the whole year.

3) Fasting the First Days of Thul-Hijjah

On pp. 121-122, al-Majlisi, in Vol. 94 of his *Bihar al-Anwar*, quotes Muhammad ibn Ibrahim quoting 'Uthman ibn Hammad quoting al-Hassan ibn Muhammad al-Daqqaq quoting Ishaq ibn Wahab quoting Mansur ibn al-Muhajir quoting Muhammad ibn al-'Ata quoting 'Ayesha saying that a young man with a very beautiful voice used to fast as soon as the crescent of Thul-Hijjah was sighted, so people raised this issue with the Messenger of Allah (S) who ordered him to be brought to him.

Having presented himself before the Prophet (S), he was asked by the Messenger of Allah (S), 'What makes you fast during these days?' The young man said, 'May both my father and mother be sacrificed for your sake, O Messenger of Allah! These are days to honor the places which Allah has decreed to be held as sacred, and these are the days for performing the pilgrimage; (I do so) in the hope that Allah will include me in the pilgrims' supplications.'

The Messenger of Allah (S) then said, 'In this case, for each of these days which you fast you shall receive rewards equivalent to setting one hundred slaves free in addition to sacrificing a hundred cattle for the Ka'ba, and providing a hundred horses to transport those who make *jihad* in defense of Islam. So when it is the Day of Tarwiyah [1](#), you will receive rewards equivalent to setting one thousand slaves free in addition to sacrificing a thousand cattle for the Ka'ba and a thousand horses to transport those who make *jihad* in defense of Islam.

On the day of Arafat, you will receive rewards equivalent to setting two thousand slaves free in addition

to sacrificing two thousand heads of cattle for the Ka'ba and two thousand horses to transport those who go on *jihad* to defend Islam, in addition to forgiveness of the sins of sixty past years and sixty ones thereafter." This tradition is recorded on p. 101 of *Thawab al-A'mal wa 'Iqab al-A'mal* by Shaikh al-Qummi al-Saduq.

4) Fasting the Day When the Earth was Expanded

Verse 30, Chapter 79 (al-Nazi'at), reads, "And the earth He expanded thereafter." The Arabic word used with reference to the earth's expansion is *daha*. On p. 122, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, and also on p. 101 of al-Saduq's *Thawab al-A'mal*, Ahmed ibn Idris quotes al-Ash'ari quoting Ahmed ibn al-Husayn quoting Abu Tahir ibn Hamza quoting al-Washsha' saying that he, then a young man, was once in the company of his father when they ate supper with Imam al-Rida (as) on the 25th of Thul-Qi'da.

The Imam (as) told us that that night was the night during which Prophets Ibrahim and Jesus son of Mary, peace be upon them, were born, and also when the earth was expanded from underneath the Ka'ba, in addition to some other attribute relevant to it which I never heard from anyone else, adding, "Whoever fasts during its day will be regarded as though he had fasted for full sixty months."

5) Fasting the Day of Arafat

Three books make a reference to such fast: *Bihar al-Anwar* (p. 123, Vol. 94), *'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* (p. 36, Vol. 2), and *'Ilal al-Sharai'* (p. 73, Vol. 2). These books cite a tradition narrated by Abu Abdullah Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) in which the Imam (as) says, "The Messenger of Allah (S) appointed only (Imam) Ali (as) as his successor, while (Imam) Ali (as) assigned Imamate to both (his sons) al-Hassan and al-Husayn (as). When al-Hassan (as) was the Imam, a man entered on the day of Arafat and saw al-Hassan (as) eating his lunch while al-Husayn (as) was fasting.

The same man came to see al-Husayn (as) when he became the Imam following the death of (Imam) al-Hassan (as), also on the Arafat day, and he saw him eating while his son (Imam) Ali son of al-Husayn (Zainul-'Abidin [as]) was fasting. The man (apparently quite confused) asked (Imam) al-Husayn (as), 'Why is it that I visited al-Hassan (as) and found him eating while you yourself were fasting, and now I visit you and find you not fasting (while your son is)?'

(Imam) al-Husayn (as) said, 'Al-Hassan was then the Imam; he did not fast for fear his fast would be regarded as a Sunnah followed by people. When he died and I became the Imam, I did not want my fast to be regarded as a Sunnah so people would follow my example.'" What Imam al-Husayn (as) meant was that to fast on the day of Arafat was very highly recommended but not obligatory. Had he (as) and his older brother al-Hassan (as) fasted it, people would have regarded its fast as an obligation rather than a highly recommended act of worship.

Bihar al-Anwar and *'Ilal al-Sharai'* cite al-Mutawakkil's son quoting al-Sa'd-Abadi quoting his father

quoting Ibn Abu 'Umayr saying that Abu Abdullah (Imam al-Sadiq [as]) said, "Fasting the 8th of Thul-Hijjah suffices to wipe out the sins committed in an entire year, and fasting the day of Arafat (the next day) suffices to atone for the sins committed in two years."

The best among Allah's creation, our master Muhammad (S), has described fast as the cure for the souls and the bodies, saying, "Fast so you may heal." He has also revealed the fact that everything in this life has a purification (*zakat*), and that "Fast is the purification (*zakat*) of bodies," as we are told on p. 59 of al-Saduq's *Amali*.

A Muslim understands the fast to be the setting on equal footing between the poor and the rich before the Almighty, for if the rich desire something, they have the means to get it; therefore, the Almighty wished to establish equality among His servants and to let the rich taste the pain of hunger so that their hearts may be softened, and to thus make them compassionate towards the weak and the hungry.

6) Siyam al-Dahr: How to Fast all Your Life

On p. 258, Vol. 1, of *Ilal al-Sharai'*, and also on p. 92, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, Imam al-Rida (as) was asked why an optional fast is recommended for the entire year, and he answered by saying that it served to complement obligatory fast. Then he was asked, "Why is there an optional fast for one day out of each ten days?" He (as) said, "It is so because Allah, the Praised and Exalted One, says, 'Whoever does a good deed will be rewarded ten-fold' (Surat al-An'am, verse 16); therefore, one who fasts one day in each ten days will be regarded (according to this verse) as though he had fasted the whole time."

Salman al-Farisi, may Allah be pleased with him, used to say, "Fasting three [non-consecutive] days a month equals fasting the whole *dahr*, the whole time; so, if one can find anything beyond that, let him fast it!" Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) was asked why a Thursday of the first tenth days is to be fasted, a Thursday of the last, and a Wednesday in-between are the designated days for such fast, and his answer was, "The deeds of each servant of Allah are displayed before Allah on each Thursday; therefore, He wished that it should be done while such servant is observing a fast. "Why another Thursday's fast at the end of the month, then?" the Imam (as) was asked. "It is so because if his deeds for eight days are displayed while he is fasting is more honorable for him and better than if he is not fasting."

The reason for choosing a Wednesday in the second (middle) ten days of the month, according to Imam al-Sadiq (as), is due to the fact that Allah, the most Honored, the most Sublime, created hell on that day; it was on it that He annihilated the early generations; it is a day of continuous bad omen; so, He wished that His servants should shun such a bad omen by fasting that day."

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) quotes his forefathers (as) saying that the Messenger of Allah (S) once asked his companions, "Which one of you fasts the whole time?" Salman al-Farisi, may Allah have mercy on his soul, said, "I do, O Messenger of Allah!" The Messenger of Allah (S) asked them, "Which one of you

says prayers the whole night?" Salman al-Farisi, may Allah have mercy on his soul, again said, "I do, O Messenger of Allah!" The Messenger of Allah (S) asked them, "Which one of you recites the entire text of the Qur'an every day?" Salman al-Farisi, may Allah have mercy on his soul, for the third time said, "I do, O Messenger of Allah!" One of the Prophet's companions became angry and said, "O Messenger of Allah! Salman is a Persian who wants to brag and demonstrate his superiority over us, we men of Quraysh.

You asked us, 'Which one of you fasts the whole time?' and he said he does so, while he eats most of the time. And you asked us, 'Which one of you says prayers the entire night?' and he again said he did so, while he sleeps most of the night. And you asked us, 'Which one of you recites the entire text of the Qur'an every day?' and he for the third time said that he did so, while most of the time he is silent." The Messenger of Allah (S) rebuked that man and said, "Keep your silence, so-and-so, for how far you are from Luqman the Wise! Ask him, and he will explain to you," whereupon that companion turned to Salman and asked him thus: "O father of Abdullah! You have claimed that you fast the whole time, haven't you?"

Salman answered him in the affirmative, so the companion said, "But I have seen you eating most of the time!" Salman said, "It is not what you say! I fast three days in every month, and Allah, the most Exalted, the most Glorified One, says,

'Whoever does a good deed will be rewarded ten-fold' (Quran Surat al-An'am, 6: 16).

And I join the month of Sha'ban with the month of Ramadhan in my fast, so it is regarded as though I fast the whole time." The man then asked him, "But you claim that you spend your entire night offering prayers, don't you?" Salman answered in the affirmative, whereupon that man said to him, "How so since most of your night you are in bed?" Salman said, "It is not as you say. I have heard my beloved Messenger of Allah (S) say, 'Whoever remains in a state of *tahara* (purification) during his sleep will be regarded as though he spent the whole night offering prayers,' and I do remain *tahir!*"

The man still asked him, "Have you not claimed that you recite the entire text of the Qur'an every day?" Salman said, "I have." The man then asked him, "But you spend most of the day silent!" Salman said, "It is not as you say, but I have heard my beloved Messenger of Allah (S) telling Ali (as): 'O father of al-Hassan (as)! Your similitude in my nation is like that of Surat al-Ikhlās: whoever recites it once is considered as having recited one third of the entire text of the Qur'an, and whoever recites it twice is considered as having recited two-thirds of the Qur'an, while whoever recites it thrice will be regarded as having recited the entire text of the Qur'an; whoever loves you with his tongue completes one third of his *iman* (conviction), and whoever loves you with both his tongue and heart completes two thirds of his *iman*, whereas whoever loves you with his tongue and heart and assists you with his hand (i.e. physically with his might and means) perfects his *iman*.

I swear by the One Who sent me with the truth, O Ali! Had all people on earth loved you as those in the

heavens do, nobody would have been tormented with the Fire,¹ and I do recite Surat al-Ikhlās thrice daily." The man then stood up and left as if someone had filled his mouth with a rock (as the Arabs put it). This incident is recorded on pp. 93–94, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*.

In the same reference cited above, Imam al-Sadiq (as) quotes his forefathers citing the Messenger of Allah (S) saying, "I entered Paradise [during my ascension, *mi'raj*] and found most of its people to be those who are not evil, who are wise in spending their wealth, and who fast three days a month."

Ibn Tareef quotes Ibn 'Alwan quoting Imam al-Sadiq (as) quoting his father Imam al-Baqir (as) saying that Ali (as) used to imitate the fast observed by the Messenger of Allah (S), saying, "The Messenger of Allah (S) fasted *siyam al-dahr* as long as Allah willed, then he stopped doing so and observed the fast of his brother Dawood (as) (David): a day's fast for Allah, and a day for himself (to rest) as long as Allah willed. Then he stopped doing that, too, and started fasting each Monday and Thursday for as long as Allah willed. Then he stopped doing even that and upheld *siyam al-beed* [2](#).

Imam Ali (as) concludes his statement by saying that the Messenger of Allah (S) continued to do so till he passed away. On p. 102, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, the author states that Muhammad ibn Yahya has quoted Hammad ibn 'Uthman quoting Imam Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq (as) saying, "The Messenger of Allah (S) died while observing a fast of three days a month, saying, 'They equal fasting the whole time, and their fast removes ill intentions and feelings of hostility.'¹ He (S) was asked, 'Why were these specific days chosen for such fast?' He (S) answered by saying, 'Retribution was inflicted upon nations before us during those days;' so, the Prophet (S) observed the fast of those ominous days."

The Messenger of Allah (S) is quoted on p. 108, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar* as saying that one who observes the fast of the month of Ramadhan and follows it by fasting six days during the month of Shawwal will be rewarded as though he had fasted the entire year.

One may wonder whether offering *sadaqa* (charity) is more rewarding than fasting. It is. On p. 102, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, it is stated that Imam Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq (as) was asked once by Ibrahim al-Muthanna, one of his followers, "I have found it very hard for me lately to fast three days a month; so, is there any way I can make it up by, say, giving one dirham by way of charity for each of these days?" The Imam (as) answered, "One dirham's charity is even better than fasting one day."

In the same reference, on p. 106, Salih ibn 'Uqbah said to Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as), "May my life be sacrificed for your sake! I have grown to be an old man, and I feel too feeble to observe the fast of these days." The Imam (as) responded by saying, "Then offer *sadaqa* of one dirham (cash equivalent in value to 3.12 grams of silver) for each day." The Imam noticed that the man did not seem to be fully convinced, so he said to him, "Do you think one *dirham* for each of these days is too little? Feeding one indigent person is better than the fast of a whole month."

[1](#). This is the 8th of Thul-Hijjah, the day, as recorded on p. 347, Vol. 14, of the lexicon *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manzour, when the pilgrims fill their water bags and prepare to go to Mina.

[2.](#) Explanation of the meaning of siyam al-beed, fasting the "white days," has already been indicated on p. 30 above.

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