

## Seventh Means, Fast (Sawm)

Fasting is one of the greatest worship which exerts tremendous influence in one's efforts for self-perfection, self purification, and self building. There are many traditions which describe the special distinction assigned to fasting. Following are few examples: The Holy Prophet (S) has said:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: الصوم جنة من النار.

*“The Fasting is a shield for protection against Hell's fire.”<sup>1</sup>*

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

عن ابي عبدالله عليه السلام قال: ان الله تعالى يقول: الصوم لى وانا اجزى عليه.

*“God-Almighty said: ' Fasting is for Me and I bestow its reward upon the fast observer.”<sup>2</sup>*

And said:

قال ابو عبدالله عليه السلام: ان الصائم منكم ليرتفع فى رياض الجنة وتدعو له لا ملائكة حتى يفطر.

*“The fast observer moves an enjoys inside the Garden of Paradise, and angels pray for him until the fast breaking time.”<sup>3</sup>*

The Holy Prophet (S) has said:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: من صام يوما تطوعا ابتغا ثواب الله وجيب له المغفرة.

*“Whoever observes one recommended fast for the sake of reward, forgiveness for him becomes*

compulsory.”<sup>4</sup>

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) has said:

عن أبي عبدالله عليه السلام قال: نوم الصائم عبادة وصمته تسبيح وعلمه متقبل ودعائه مستجاب.

*“The sleep of a fast observer is regarded as worship; his silence is considered as praise, his deeds are accepted and his supplications are granted.”<sup>5</sup>*

The Holy Prophet (S) has said:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: قال الله عز وجل: كل أعمال ابن آدم بعشرة أضعافها إلى سبعمائة ضعف إلا الصبر، فإنه لي وأنا أجزى به، فتواب الصبر مخزون في علم الله والصبر هو الصوم.

*“God-Almighty said: 'For all righteous deeds of servants there is a reward from ten times to seven hundred time, but since, fasting is specially reserved for me –I will bestow its reward. Therefore. only God-Almighty knows the reward of fasting.’<sup>6</sup>*

Fasting. is a special worship which is a combination of two parts i.e. negation and confrontation. The first part consists of self-Restraint and renunciation of drinking, eating, and sexual pleasures, which are legitimate pleasures, as well as not to tell a lie about God-Almighty and Holy Prophet (S) and some other affairs which have been described in details in Jurisprudential books.

The second part consists of devotion, intention, and desire to seek God's Nearness, which in reality are tantamount to soul of this worship. The reality of fasting consists of self-restraint and voluntary .relinquishment of material pleasures namely –Eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, and not to tell a lie about God-Almighty and Holy Prophet (S), with the intention of God’s Nearness.

The definition of a fast as given in the books of Jurisprudence is -- that if some one with the intention of God's Nearness renounced the affairs namely –eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, discharge of semen, telling a lie about God-Almighty and Holy Prophet (S), to take a dive inside water, remaining in the state of impurity as a result of a wet dream –his fast is correct and does not require to take a make up (*qadha*) fast or pay ransom (*kuffara*). This fast is known as the fast of common people.

But, in traditions the scope of self-restraint have not been limited to the above mentioned limits rather it covers much wider dimensions. In traditions it has been mentioned that simply abandonment of eating and drinking is not enough, instead a real fast observer is the one who prevents all his limbs and body parts from sins. i.e. the eyes should be prevented from the sins relevant to the eyes, as well as prevent ears, tongue, hands, and feet from their relevant sins. Such fast belongs to God’s special servants.

Further, superior than this is the fasting of the most special ones (*khawwas*) in which case the observer of the fast apart from abandoning eating, drinking as well as renunciation of all sins also disengages his heart from all sort of scattered thinking which prevent him from God's Remembrance. He should continuously engage himself in God's remembrance and should know that He is seeing all his actions. As God's guest he should make himself readied for His countenance. For example let us refer to the following tradition: Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

قال ابو عبدالله عليه السلام: ليس الصيام من الطعام والشراب أن لا يأكل الانسان ولا يشرب فقط ولكن إذا صمت فليصم سمعك وبصرك ولسانك وبطنك وفرجك واحفظ يدك وفرجك وأكثر السكوت إلا من خير وارفق بخادمك.

*“Fasting is not achieved simply by renunciation of eating and drinking. When you observe fast your eyes, ears, tongue, stomach, and sexual parts should also be fasting with you. While in the state of fasting prevent your hands and sexual parts from sinning, should remain silent continuously except for speaking something good and useful or to the extent it is required to communicate with your house servant.”<sup>7</sup>*

Also said:

قال ابو عبدالله عليه السلام: وليكن عليك وقار الصائم وألزم ما استطعت من الصمت والسكوت إلا عن ذكر الله. ولا تجعل يوم صومك كيوم فطرك.

*“The dignity and prestige of fasting should be understood by you wry clearly. As much as possible, maintain silence except for God's Remembrance. It should not be such that the day of your fasting should be similar to the day in which you are not observing fast.”<sup>8</sup>*

The Holy Prophet (S) said in a sermon:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله, في خطبة له: ومن صام شهر رمضان في إنصات وسكوت وكف سمعه وبصره ولسانه وفرجه وجوارحه من الكذب والحرام والغيبة تقربا, قربه الله منه حتى تمس ركبته ركبتي إبراهيم خليل الرحمن.

*“Whosoever observes fasting during Holy month of Ramadhan while maintaining silence and preventing his ears, eyes, tongue, sexual organs, and other body parts from lying, backbiting, and other forbidden acts, with the intention of achieving God's Nearness, God-Almighty will bestow upon him His Nearness, so that he will become a companion of Prophet Abraham (a.s.) –God's chosen friend.”<sup>9</sup>*

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

عن ابي عبدالله عليه السلام قال: إن الصيام ليس من الطعام والشراب وحده, إنما للصوم شرط يحتاج أن يحفظ

حتى يتم الصوم وهو الصمت الداخل، أما تسمع قول مريم بنت عمران، اني نذرت للرحمن صوما فلن اكلم اليوم انسيا، يعنى صمتا. فاذا صمتم فاحفظوا ألسنتكم عن الكذب وعضوا أبصاركم ولا تنازعوا ولا تحاسدوا ولا تغتابوا ولا تماروا ولا تكذبوا ولا تباشروا ولا تخالفوا ولا تغاضبوا ولا تسابوا ولا تشاتموا ولا تنازوا ولا تجادلوا ولا تبادوا ولا تظلموا ولا تسافهوا ولا تزاجروا ولا تغفلوا عن ذكر الله وعن الصلاة وألزموا الصمت والسكوت والحلم والصبر والصدق ومجانبة أهل الشر واجتنبوا قول الزور والكذب والفراء والخصومة وظن السوء والغيبة والنميمة وكونوا مشرفين على الآخرة منتظرين ليامكم، منتظرين لما وعدكم الله متزودين للقاء الله وعليكم السكينة والوقار والخشوع والخضوع وذل العبد الخائف من مولاه راجين خائفين راغبين راهبين قد طهرتم القلوب من العيوب وتقديست سرائركم من الخب ونظفت الجسم من القاذورات، وتبرأت إلى الله من عداه وواليت الله في صومك بالصمت من جميع الجهات مما قد نهاك الله عنه في السر والعلانية وخشيت الله حق خشيته في السر والعلانية ووهبت نفسك لله في أيام صومك وفرغت قلبك له

فيما امرك ودعاك اليه، فاذا فعلت ذلك كله فانت صائم لله بحقيقة سومه صانع لما امرك وكلما نقصت منها شيئاً مما: بينت لك فقد نقص من صومك بمقدار ذلك (إلى أن قال) إن الصوم ليس من الطعام والشراب إنما جعل الله ذلك حجاباً مما سواها من الفواحش من الفعل والقول يفطر الصائم ، ما أقل الصوماء وأكثر الجواع؟

*“Fasting does not mean only renunciation of eating and drinking rather it has conditions which must be followed strictly in order to have a complete and perfect fast which means internal silence. Did not you hear the reply of Mary daughter of Imran who said to the people:*

*“I have vowed a fast for God–Almighty, therefore, today will speak to none i.e. since, I am fasting therefore must be quiet. ' So, when you observe fast protect your tongue from lying; don't be angry; don't curse, don't be rude; don't argue and dispute; due to ignorance don't reject or be indecent to each other, don't be negligent from God's remembrance; continuously practice silence, intellection, patience and keep distance from the wicked people. Assign importance to the Hereafter; must look forward for the day when God's Promise will be fulfilled; and collect some provisions for God's countenance.*

*“Poise dignity, humbleness, humility, and fear like a servant who is afraid of his master, should be practiced; should remain in the state of hope and fear. If you cleansed and purified your heart from faults; your inner self from conceit and treachery; your body from pollution, renounced every thing other than God; accepted His Guardianship through fasting, and preventing inner and outer self from performance of God ' s forbidden things; respected God's rights by remaining afraid outwardly and inwardly because of His presence,. during fasting donated your self to God–Almighty, purified and cleansed heart for God–Almighty and assigned him to act in accordance to His commands.*

*“If you observed fast in a manner described above, then indeed you really are a true fast observer and have discharged your duty well. But in as much as you deviated from the above criteria, your fast be considered as deficient and incomplete in the same proportion.*

*Because, fasting is not limited only to renunciation of eating and drinking rather God–Almighty has made*

fasting a veil for other actions and sayings which make fasting canceled. Therefore, how small is the number of fast observers and how large is the number of hungry ones.”<sup>10</sup>

## Role of Fasting in Self-Building

Fasting is one of the most important and valuable worship, which if, observed in accordance to its special etiquettes and conditions, and maintaining the same degree of quality as required by sacred Islamic canon law (*sharia*), will exert tremendous impact upon the self-building, self-perfection, and self-purification efforts.

Fasting is extremely influential during the stages of purification of self from sins and other moral indecencies and making it readied for perfection, decoration and utilization of Divine Illuminations. A fast observer through renunciation of sins controls, subdues, and ultimately forces the imperious-self into submission. The duration of fasting is a period of quitting sins and practicing self-asceticism –a period of struggling with self, and practicing self-restraint.

During this period a fast observer not only purify and cleanse his self from sins and other moral abjectnesses, but even abandons his legitimate pleasures such as eating and drinking, and through these means makes his self purified and illuminated. Because, hunger results in attaining internal purification and more attention towards God-Almighty. A human being, while hungry very often possesses a feeling of contentment or Joy<sup>11</sup> but lacks such mood when his stomach is full.

In summary, fasting is very effective in acquiring piety, and because, of this consideration the Holy Qur’an has defined acquiring piety as the main objective behind the fasting.

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

***“O ye believe! Fasting is presented for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil).” (Quran 2: 183)***

The one who observes fast during the Holy month of Ramadhan, because, of fasting prevents himself from engaging into sins and other moral abjectnesses through out the month, would succeed in dominating his self and therefore, may continue this habit of renunciation of sins even after the Holy month.”

So for whatever has been described was related to the influence of fasting in purifying self from sins and other moral indecencies. But also from the point of view of positive dimensions it is very influential in achieving self-purification, decoration of inner self and God's Nearness which will be described briefly as follows:

1. Fasting i.e. self-restraint and renunciation of special acts which break the fast –is a worship, which if

observed with sincerity and intention of God's Nearness, results in nourishment and perfection of self and God's Nearness like other worships.

2. By renunciation of legitimate pleasures and quitting sins the fast observer's heart gets cleansed and polished, becomes free from all scattered thoughts and memories of other than God and through this means earns the decency of absorbing the Divine blessings and illuminations.

In this stage God's special blessings and favors are bestowed upon him and, thus, with Divine rapture ascends towards God's countenance. It is because of these reasons that it has been mentioned in the traditions that breathing and sleeping of a fast observer merit the reward of a worship.

3. The days of fasting are the best times for worship, prayer, supplication, Qur'anic-recital, invocation and charitable deeds; because, during this period self is relatively better prepared for heart's presence, devotion and attention towards God-Almighty as compared to any other period. The Holy Month of Ramadhan have been called as the best times, spring of worship (specially recital of the Holy Qur'an) and the most appropriate opportunity for paying attention to wards God-Almighty.

Because, of this reason the special virtues of the Holy Month of Ramadhan and worshipping during it, have been emphasized a lot in the books of Islamic traditions. For example; when the Holy Month of Ramadhan arrived, Imam al- Sadiq (a.s.) emphasized its importance to his children and said:

ان ابا عبدالله عليه السلام يوصى ولده إذا دخل شهر رمضان: فاجهدوا أنفسكم فإن فيه تقسم الأرزاق وتكتب الآجال وفيه يكتب وفد الله الذين يفدون إليه وفيه ليلة العمل فيها خير من العمل في ألف شهر

*“Endeavor in worship because in this month people 's sustenance is distributed and their demises are registered, those who will be returned to God-Almighty are decided in this month, In this month there is a special “Night of Power” (Qadr), the worshipping in which excels the worshipping of one thousands months.”<sup>12</sup>*

The Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said:

قال أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام: عليك في شهر رمضان بكثرة الدعاء والإستغفار فاما الدعاء فيدفع به عنكم البلا واما الإستغفار فتمحى به ذنوبكم

“Oh people! During the Holy Month of Ramadhan read a lot of supplication and seek God's pardon (Esteghfar) because, by means of supplications the calamities are removed from you and by means of asking God's pardon your sins are forgiven.” <sup>13</sup>

Also he said that one day the Holy Prophet delivered a sermon in which he said:

على عليه السلام قال: ان رسول الله خطبنا ذات يوم فقال: أيها الناس انه قد أقبل إليكم شهر الله بالبركة والرحمة والمغفرة ، شهر هو عند الله أفضل الشهور وأيامه أفضل الأيام ولياليه أفضل الليالي وساعاته أفضل الساعات هو شهر دعيتم فيه إلى ضيافة الله وجعلتم فيه من أهل كرامة الله، أنفاسكم فيه تسبيح، ونومكم فيه عبادة، وعملكم فيه مقبول، ودعاءكم فيه مستجاب. فاسألوا الله ربكم بنيات صادقة وقلوب طاهرة ان يوفقكم لصيامه وتلاوة كتابه، فان الشقي كل الشقي من حرم غفران الله في هذا الشهر العظيم، واذكروا بجوعكم وعطشكم فيه جوع يوم القيامة وعطشه، وتصدقوا على فقرائكم ومساكينكم، ووقروا كباركم وارحموا صغاركم وصلوا أرحامكم واحفظوا ألسنتكم وعضوا عما لا يحل النظر إليه أبصاركم وعما لا يحل الاستماع إليه أسماعكم، وتحننوا على أيتام الناس يتحنن على أيتامكم. وتوبوا إلى الله من ذنوبكم وارفعوا إليه أيديكم بالدعاء، في أوقات صلاتكم فإنها أفضل الساعات ينظر الله فيها إلى عباده بعين الرحمة، يجيبهم إذا ناجوه ويلببهم إذا نادوه ويعطيهم إذا سألوه ويستجيب لهم إذا دعوه.

أيها الناس إن أنفسكم مرهونة بأعمالكم ففكوها باستغفاركم، وظهوركم ثقيلة من أوزاركم فخففوا عنها بطول سجودكم، واعملوا أن الله أقسم بعزته أن لا يعذب المصلين والساجدين وان لا يروعهم بالنار يوم يقوم الناس لرب العالمين. أيها الناس من فطر منكم صائماً مؤمناً في هذا الشهر كان له بذلك عند الله عتق رقبة ومغفرة لما مضى من ذنوبه.

قيل: يا رسول الله! وليس كلنا يقدر على ذلك فقال صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم اتقوا الله ولو بشرية من ماء، واتقوا النار ولو بشق تمرة أيها الناس من حسن منكم في هذا الشهر خلقه كان له جواز على الصراط يوم تزل فيه الأقدام، ومن خفف فيه عما ملكت يمينه خفف الله عليه حسابه، ومن كف فيه شره كف الله عنه غضبه يوم يلقاه، ومن أكرم فيه يتيماً أكرمه الله يوم يلقاه، ومن وصل فيه رحمه وصله الله برحمته يوم يلقاه، ومن قطع فيه رحمه قطع الله عنه رحمته يوم يلقاه، ومن تطوع بصلاة كتب الله له براءة من النار، ومن أدى فيه فرضاً كان له ثواب من أدى سبعين فريضة في ما سواه من الشهور، ومن أكثر فيه من الصلاة عليّ ثقل الله ميزانه يوم تخف الموازين، ومن تلا..فيه آية من القرآن كان له مثل أجر من ختم القرآن في غيره من الشهور.

أيها الناس: إن أبواب الجنان في هذا الشهر مفتحة فاسألوا ربكم أن لا يغلقها عليكم، وأبواب النيران مغلقة فاسألوا الله أن لا يفتحها عليكم، والشياطين مغلولة، فاسألوا ربكم أن لا يسلطها عليكم. قال أمير المؤمنين علي (عليه السلام) فقلت: يا رسول الله! ما أفضل الأعمال في هذا الشهر؟ فقال: يا أبا الحسن أفضل الأعمال في هذا الشهر الورع عن محارم الله.

*“Oh people! The month of God with blessing mercy and pardon has come to you, a month which is the best month among all months before God–Almighty, its days are the best days, its nights are the best nights and its hours are the best hours.*

*It is month in which you have been invited by God–Almighty for a feast, and have been selected as the recipient of this special favor. Your breathings merit the reward of praise, while your sleeping in this month earns the reward of a worship. In this month your deeds are accepted and prayers are granted.”*

*“Therefore, with true intention and pure hearts beseech God–Almighty to bestow upon you His special favor to be able to observe fasting and recite the Holy Qur’an. Because, the most unfortunate and wretched one is the one who remains deprived from God’s pardon during this great month.*

*With your thrust and hunger remind yourself about the thrust and hunger of the Day of Judgment; pay charity to poor and destitute people, pay respect to elders; be kind towards youngsters, and observe the bonds of relationship with your kith and kins.”*

*“Watch your tongues, cover your eyes from seeing forbidden objects and prevent your ears from hearing forbidden affairs. Be kind to the orphans of the people so that the others are kind towards your orphans.*

*Repent for your sins and at the time of prayer raise your hands upward, because, these hours are the best hours in which God–Almighty looks towards mankind with mercy and compassion. Their hymns are granted, their cries are heard. Whatever they ask is bestowed upon them and their prayers are fulfilled.”*

*“Oh people! Your (selves) are mortgaged against your deeds and therefore, by means of repentance make yourself free. Your back has become too much heavy due to sins; by prolongation of your prostration make yourself light burdened. Know that! God–Almighty has taken the oath of his Majesty and Splendor that he will not punish those who offers prayers and bows down in prostration, and on the Day of Judgment will not scare them through the Hell's fire.”*

*“Oh people! whoever in this month will make arrangements for the fast–breaking (iftar) of a believer will be bestowed upon the reward equal to freeing of a slave and all of his past sins shall be pardoned. He was asked: 'Oh prophet of God! But all of us are not in a position to arrange the fast–breaking of a fast–observer. The Prophet replied: 'Protect yourself from the Hell's fire and offer fast–breaking even if it happens to be a piece of date with a glass of sharbet.”*

*“Oh people! whoever makes his conduct better in this month, on the Judgment Day will be bestowed upon the permit for crossing over the Sirat. Whoever will open the knots of difficulties of people's affairs in this month, God–Almighty on the Judgment Day will make the accounting of his deeds easier.”*

*Whoever makes people immune from his mischief, God–Almighty on the Judgment Day will make him immune from his wrath. Whoever treats an orphan with respect, on the Judgment Day, God–Almighty will treat him with honor. Whoever takes care to strengthen family bonds with relatives, God–Almighty will extend His blessing upon him on the Judgment Day, and whoever will cut off his family ties, God–Almighty too will deprive him from His blessing on the Judgment Day.”*

*“Whoever offers supererogatory prayers in this month, God–Almighty will register for him immunity from the fire. Whoever performs a compulsory deed in this month, will be bestowed the reward of seventy compulsory deeds performed in other months.*

*Whoever offers a lots of salutation upon me in this month, on the Judgment Day, God–Almighty will make the balance of his righteous deeds heavier. Whoever recites one single verse of the Holy Qur'an during this month will be bestowed the reward of finishing the entire Holy Qur'an in other months.”*

*“Oh people! The gates of Paradise are opened in this month, beseech God–Almighty that it should not*

*be closed upon you. The Doors of Hell are closed, and ask God–Almighty that they are not opened upon you. The devils are chained in this month, ask God–Almighty not to allow them to take over your control.”*

*“Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said: ‘Oh Prophet of God! which one is the best deed during this month?’ The Holy Prophet (S) replied: ‘Oh Abul Hasan! The most supreme deed in this month is piety and renunciation of Divine forbidden acts.”<sup>14</sup>*

As is evident from the above narration that the Holy Month of Ramadhan is a month full of blessings and special virtues. It is a month of worship, self–building, supplications, night prayer, and self–perfection. Worshipping in this month is bestowed rewards many times of the reward of worship performed in other months.

Even the sleeping and breathings of a believer are given the reward of a worship. In this month the gates of the Paradise are opened while the Hell's doors are closed.

God's angels continuously invite the people towards God's worship, especially at the dawn and on the night of Power (*Lailatul Qadr*) in which worshipping and night–vigil are superior than the prayer of thousands months. <sup>15</sup>God–Almighty in this month have granted an audience inviting all the believers for a Divine feast; the invitation of which have been brought by the messengers.

The host is the Most Merciful and Most compassionate God–Almighty, the God’s most favorite angels are the servants and the believers are the guests. The table spread of Divine blessings containing all sorts of rewards and favors has been provided.

From all dimensions, the Divine special blessings and favors –which cannot be seen by eyes, ears are helpless to hear about them, and human hearts cannot even imagine them are readied to be awarded upon the guests in accordance to their merits, worthiness, and absorbing capabilities.

If we are negligent, we will feel sorry and regret on the Day of Judgment, whereby feeling sorry and being regretful will not be of any advantage. The special acts and supplications of the Holy Month of Ramadhan are described in the book –*Mafateeh al–Jinan* by late Haj Abbas Qummi as well as in books of supplications; and with sincerity, attention, and heart’s presence utilize them for spiritual migration and attaining God’s Nearness.

In the end, it must be reminded that other worships too, like prayer, fasting, invocations, and supplications might be useful and effective in self–building and nourishment and perfection of the self. But for the sake of brevity it would not be appropriate to provide their detailed explanation and description in. this book.

<sup>1.</sup> Wasail al–Shi’a, vol. 7, p–289.

<sup>2.</sup> Wasail al–Shi’a, vol. 7, p–290.

<sup>3.</sup> Wasail al–Shi’a, vol., 7, p–296.

- [4.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-293.
  - [5.](#) -Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-294.
  - [6.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-295.
  - [7.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-118.
  - [8.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-117.
  - [9.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-117.
  - [10.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-119.
  - [11.](#) Those who have observed fasting during Holy Month of Ramdhan or have observed recommended fasts may appreciate these feelings [Tr].
  - [12.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-221.
  - [13.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-223.
  - [14.](#) Wasail al-Shi'a, vol. 7, p-227.
  - [15.](#) The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. (97:3) [Tr].
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