

Etiquette and Deeds of the Holy Month of Ramadhan

It has been narrated from the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a]1 that:

“Don't say Ramadhan because, you don't know what Ramadhan is. Whoever says so must pay charity and must offer an atonement fast, instead of saying Ramadhan, say the way Allah has called it the Month of Ramadhan.”

The most important duty of a devoted wayfarer in this great month is to understand the right of this Holy Month in which Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has invited the wayfarers of His path for a feast. Also he must understand the correct meanings of fasting and its relevance with Allah's invitation. Having discovered this reality he must endeavour that all his actions and deeds are accompanied with required devotion and sincerity in order to earn the pleasure of his host Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

1. Effects of Fasting and Hunger

Tolerance of hunger, the most obvious part of fasting, earns plenty of advantages for a devoted wayfarer journeying towards Allah's path from the point of view of enlightenment and knowledge of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), as well as his advancement in attaining spiritual perfection. This has been emphasized in plenty of narrations, and therefore it would be appropriate to quote first an example and later on to discuss about its wisdom. The Holy Prophet [s] has narrated:

“Engage yourself in self-struggle (Jihad al-Nafs) through the means of hunger and thirst, whose reward is equivalent to the reward of those who participated in the armed struggle for Allah's sake. There is nothing more superior before Allah's sight than tolerating hunger and thirst during fasting.”

Also said:

“The one who tolerates more hunger as well as ponders deeply about Allah as compared to others, will

be assigned higher Exalted positions before their Lord on the Day of Judgement.”

Also, he said to Asma:

“O' Asma! If you may act in a manner that when the angel of death approaches you, he should find you hungry and thirsty. If you do it you will attain the most Exalted spiritual position, will join the ranks of prophets, will make the angels happy, and will earn the divine salutations for yourself.”

And said:

“Keep your stomachs hungry and thirsty, and make your bodies used to hardships, perhaps your hearts will then have a chance of seeing Allah's glory.”

Also, in the narration of Prophet's heavenly journey (*Me'raj*) the following have been narrated:

“O' Ahmad! Do you comprehend the outcome of fasting? 'No.' Replied the Holy Prophet [s]. 'The outcome of fasting is less eating and less talking.' Replied Allah, then explained the outcome of silence and less speaking as follows:

'The result of silence is wisdom; the result of wisdom is enlightenment; the result of enlightenment is certainty; and when a person attains the Exalted spiritual position of certainty, then he does not care how does he start his day, whether with ease or hardship, and tragedy or comfort. Such is the state of those who have attained the position of content, and whoever attains this position acquires three inseparable characteristics: thanks (shukr) not contaminated with ignorance, invocation (dhikr)² not mixed with forgetfulness and love not mixed with the love of others.'

'Whoever loves Me in this manner does not intermingle the love of others with My friendship; I too love him and make others to love him; would make his heart's eyes opened, so that he could witness My Splendour and Majesty; would not deprive him from the knowledge and enlightenment bestowed by Me upon others; in the midst of night's darkness as well as during the brightness of the day would whisper and communicate with him, so that he becomes disgusted with other's company; would have him listen to My speech as well as the speech of My angels; My secrets which I keep hidden from others would become manifested upon him.

'Would saturate his wisdom with My enlightenment (ma'refat) and would sit Myself in place of his wisdom; would make the pang of death and its hardships easier for him so that he would enter Paradise with ease and comfort. When the angel of death would descend upon him would speak to him: Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! Allah is anxiously waiting for you.'

The narration continues:

At this point Allah would speak to him: 'This is My Paradise, make yourself at home, and this is My neighbourhood in which you would be dwelling forever.' Then the soul would say: 'O' my Lord! You have

introduced Yourself to me and after identifying You I became detached with Your entire creation.

By Your Splendour and Majesty I swear that in order to earn Your pleasure if I have to be slaughtered seventy times with extreme suffering and torture, even then Your consent would have been the most dearest and desirable thing for me.' At this point Allah would speak to him: 'I swear with My Splendour and Majesty that from now on there will never be any veil between Me and you, that you may see Me whenever you desire so; that is the way I treat my friends.' “

The above-mentioned narration clearly explains the merit and wisdom of hunger, and on this basis the learned scholars of moral ethics have described numerous advantages for hunger, some of them will be mentioned here as follows:

1. One of the effect of less eating is purity of heart and insight, because, over-eating and fullness creates a state similar to drunkenness within a human being which slows down his sense of perception, reducing his power of quick grasping, thus, ultimately resulting in his heart's blindness. Opposite to that, hunger results in the mind becoming sharp, bestows comprehension upon conscience, thus, making the heart readied for enlightenment. In this regard the following tradition has been narrated from the Holy Prophet [s]:

“Whoever keeps his stomach hungry his thinking culminates to the highest level, thus, making his reflections stronger.”

2. The other effects of less eating are humility, hospitality, self-breaking, earthiness, and freedom from arrogance, egotism, and haughtiness, because these are the by-products of transgression, rebellion, and ill-servitude towards Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). The one who frees himself from these calamities through hunger will also make himself readied for humility, obedience, and surrender before the Lord.

3. The other effects of less eating are lowering of intensity of sensual passions and other such motivations which invite a human being towards sinning and other deviations. As we know in most of the cases sins and transgressions are committed as a result of passionate talks and other sensual motivations, therefore, controlling these passions through hunger might free us from getting entrapped into many dangerous situations.

4. Another effect of less eating is less sleeping, we know that oversleeping is one of the most important factor of wasting of our age which is the precious sum at our disposal for our hereafter's affairs. But hunger reduces sleep, thus, providing opportunities for night vigil, the source of all blessings and bounties, and helps a human being in worshipping and supplications which is the ladder for his attaining the most desirable spiritual station (*Maqam al-Mahmud*).

5. Another effect of less eating is the ease of worshipping rather servitude, because, the one who is used to less eating will save a lot of time which otherwise must have been spent for making

arrangements, purchasing, cooking, consuming, and relieving, as well as time spent for medical treatment, since in many cases the sickness is the cause of over-eating. Therefore, he will utilize all this available time in worship and servitude; in addition to that he will free himself from the hardships of arranging good foods and medical treatments, which means that he will be having more free time as well as more ease and comfort.

6. Another effect of less eating is the financial ability of a person to spend for charity, benevolence, pilgrimage, and other acts of worship which require expenses, because, a lot of expenses spent only for providing unnecessary food items or for medical treatment as a result of over-eating, could be utilized for the above-mentioned worships. The advantages described are so vast in scope that the faculty of reason is helpless to describe their profundities.

Especially, the prime advantages are purity of heart, sharpness of mind and thinking, because, thinking is tantamount to ultimate result while our other actions and deeds are tantamount to preliminaries. Even thinking or meditating in itself is spiritual journey while the other actions and deeds constitute the preliminaries and background of this spiritual journey. It is in this background that the narration says:

“Meditating for even a single second is better than worshipping for seventy years.”

With the above-mentioned introduction we may see the numerous advantages and important points including:

1. One can discover with certainty that why Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), treats his guests with hunger. Is not hunger is the best means of attaining His knowledge, nearness, and countenance? Are not Allah's knowledge, nearness and countenance the most dearest and esteemed things?

2. It also becomes clearly explicit that fasting is not a divine obligation, rather is a invitation for attaining divine ceremonies, whose requirement is a divine Grace bestowed upon us for which we must be thankful to Allah. Awareness of this point makes clear the divine proclamation in the following verse:

“O' ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may ward off (evil).”

– Holy Qur'an (2:183)

is a proclamation, extremely honourable, esteemed, distinguished, and sweet, because, it is an invitation to sit upon the table full of His generosity and to attain the sacred spiritual station of His union (*wasal*) and countenance (*laq'a*).

3. Realization of the fact that the wisdom behind the indispensability of fasting that is less eating, is to weaken the sinful sensual passions; therefore, we should not indulge in over-eating and consuming more food than the daily requirements after fast-breaking (*iftar*), thus, in this manner making the fasting and hunger of the whole day as useless.

4. Awareness about the merits and advantages of fasting would reveal that in order to observe it properly with devotion, we must make our best efforts so that we are not deprived from utilizing its vast benefits.

5. Pondering about the indispensability of fasting would reveal things, which enhance the value and worth of fasting, things which decrease its worth, and things which contradict and oppose fasting. It is from these considerations that the meanings of the following tradition can be appreciated, which says:

“Fasting is not only renunciation of food and drink, while observing fasting your flesh, eyes, tongue, and in accordance with certain traditions even skin and hairs must observe fasting and must remain pious and ascetic.”

6. The above explanation would also reveal that our aim and objective for fasting should not be either for the sake of freedom from Hell's punishment or for receiving the bounties of Paradise, even though both of these objectives are achieved through fasting. Rather our aim and intention from fasting should be that this deed would make us closer to Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), thus, helping us attaining union with Him. It would lead a human being farther apart from bodily sensual desires and would make him closer to angelic and spiritual virtues.

Pondering about the above-mentioned explanation would reveal that, since Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has invited us for His benevolence, any sort of talk, action, and behavior which would make us farther away from divine presence, would be indicative of negligence on our part, and would not be complimentary to that.

Therefore, from these considerations we should not like and approve it, because, sitting in this state upon the table of blessing of the One who has invited us and is knowledgeable about all our thinking, thoughts, and plans while He is caring about us and we are naive towards Him, He is remembering us while we are negligent towards Him, and He is looking towards us while we are turning our faces away from Him, of course, would be impolite and rude, and no wise person would tolerate such behavior from any of his friends.

But Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), because of His special grace and favours towards His bondsman, has not considered these indecent behaviours and inexcusable negligence as forbidden (*haram*) and considering this negligence factor, has assigned obligations for His bondman which are far lesser in magnitude than their capacities. For the sake of their ease, have allowed them to observe only parts of obligations as much as they may, and has overlooked the portions not performed by them.

However, on the other hand, His great devoted servants don't allow themselves to behave in this manner with their Lord, rather in every deed whether compulsory or forbidden, act in a manner which suits with their servitude and bondage as well as is decent enough for the Divinity and Splendour of their Lord, and those who show negligence in this path, and do not care about the rights of their bondage and the divinity of their creator are regarded by them as damned and destitute.

Regarding fasting, what conditions Imam al-Sadiq [a] considers essential for the authenticity of fasting, some of them would be described here as follows:

“The fast observer should consider himself as Hereafter's traveller, should remain in the state of humility, fear, self-degradation, and like a servant fearing his master, should remain afraid of Allah; his heart should remain pure from defects and contamination, and his inner-self should be free from everything except Allah; must sacrifice his entire friendship and intentions for Him and must purify his heart from all other friendships except Allah's; must surrender his eyes and soul to Him; must commit his soul for His remembrance; must utilize his body in Allah's path and must keep it distant apart especially the tongue from all sorts of sins and indecencies. Whoever has observed these limitations had indeed discharged his obligations of fasting properly, and whoever has shown negligence to discharge these obligations has wasted his fast and would not be benefited from its reward.”

We must think about musts which Imam al-Sadiq [a] in this narration has considered essential for a fast observer, so that we may appreciate the advantages and blessings incorporated therein. For example, a fast observer who consider himself as a Hereafter's traveller – a traveller who is nearing his final destination – obviously will not be interested in worldly allurements, and will not pay attention towards anything except collection of provisions for his eternal journey. Or for example, a fast observer who is in a state of humility and heart-brokenness would not be interested in anything, except attaching himself to Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), and would be pleased with His remembrance.

And the fast observer who has surrendered his body and soul absolutely to Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), wouldn't care for anything except Him, inevitably his soul and body, self and conscience, and his entire existence would be filled with Allah's remembrance, love, worship, and servitude. And the fasting of someone like him is the fasting of favourites. (I swear by Allah in the name of His favourite and friends that may He bless us with the grace of undertaking such a fast at least once in lifetime).

2. Types of Fasting

There are three types of fasting:

1. The fasting of commons, which is the renunciation of eating and drinking, and observance of other fasting requirements as described in the Books of Jurisprudence.
2. The fasting of nobles, which in addition to the above also includes renunciation of sins i.e. controlling eyes, ears, tongue, and other bodily parts from sinning and transgression.
3. The fasting of most distinguished nobles which in addition to the renunciation of the above also includes relinquishment of everything, be it permissible or forbidden, which makes mind and conscience negligent from Allah's remembrance.

Of course, it must be understood that even the fasting of noble and the fasting of most distinguished

notables in itself contains infinite degrees and ranks, i.e. like the believers containing various degrees and ranks in accordance with their piety and asceticism, inevitably their fasting too will differ on the basis of the magnitude of their piety and asceticism. Considering that each believer possesses a particular degree of faith and piety, it could be said that faith, piety, and fasting have as much as ranks and degrees as there are the number of believers.

3. Classification of Fast observers On the Basis of Their Aims and Intentions

As described earlier that fasting can be classified into three categories in accordance with renunciation of things; on the basis of aims and intentions, fasting may be classified into five categories as follows:

1. A group of people observe fasting without having particular aim and intention which could be the basis of correctness of their deeds and accordingly could prevent their deeds from becoming nullified. For example, some might observe fasting, because of fear from the people, or for the sake of their material and worldly benefits, or may observe fasting because of prevailing habits among Muslims. Some observe fasting in order to remain immune from people's persecution as well as not to remain deprived from material gains and advantages obtained through intermingling with the community.
2. A group of people observe fasting in order to remain immune from peoples persecution, as well as not to remain deprived from material advantages obtained through social intermingling; in order to remain immune from Hell's punishments as well as not to be deprived from the bounties of Paradise.
3. Another group observe fasting only for the sake of immunity from Hell's punishment, or for utilization of Heavenly bounties, or for the sake of both.
4. Another group observe fasting for the sake of immunity from Hell's punishment as well as to be blessed with Heavenly bounties, but in addition to that, also to seek Allah's pleasure and nearness.
5. In the end there is a group who observe fasting and does not have any other intention and aim except Allah's pleasure and nearness. They observe fast only in order to become closer to Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), and to attain the position of His consent.

4. Special Fasting – the Affairs of Allah's Favourite Saints

It has been narrated that fasting carries still further higher ranks, and that is the fasting of those who observe fasting and worship only because they consider, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), as worthy of worshipping. They do not have any intention and objective in their fasting and worshipping, even the aim and intention of becoming nearer to Him and attaining His pleasure and countenance. They consider even worshipping and fasting with the intention of Allah's countenance and nearness as incomplete, and I myself have seen someone like this who considered such worships and deeds as worshipping of self or

egotism.

It seems that their thinking is not acceptable, and I don't believe that there is any prophet, imam, or favourite angel whose deeds and worships would be based solely upon his belief that Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), deserves worshipping and in none of his deeds wouldn't have desired even attaining Allah's nearness and countenance . And if, some of the mystics considered worshipping with the intention of Allah's nearness and attaining His countenance as self-worshipping or egotism they have acted extravagantly with exaggeration.

Of course, it must be understood that occasionally a situation arises for mystics and saints, whereby their worships, actions, and even intentions are not for the sake of attaining Allah's nearness or countenance rather they do it because, they consider Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), as worthy of worshipping. But, I don't believe that continuation of this situation permanently would be possible for any of the prophets what to say about others.

And I don't prefer even worship with this intention, over the worship performed for the sake of attaining Allah's nearness and countenance. How could I prefer such a worship because, I do not know any worship superior than the worship's of the Holy Prophet [s] and Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a], which in accordance with various traditions, in most of the cases, were performed with the sole intention of attaining Allah's countenance and pleasure.

Even, I can go further deeper and say that it is not far away from reality that maybe some of the times the worships of these nobles might have been performed with the intention of fear from divine punishment. And why shouldn't it be so? Is it possible that someone's intensity of fear from divine punishment be so severe that whenever he would think about Hell would result in his fainting?⁴ Then how come such severe fear wouldn't be effective in his actions and worships? I believe that if such a thing is not impossible, it is far away from being accepted.

I may even say that the situations of divine prophets and saints including their Lord and Master the Prophet of Islam differ significantly, and the reason of this difference is due to the respective manifestations of the glory of Allah's sacred names upon them. At times, when the sacred names of Allah's beauty were manifested upon them they become infatuated with His love, sought comfort in His love and affection, behaved like a lover uttering amorous words, did not desire any thing other than Him, and even sometimes behaved in affected manners. And when the sacred divine names of Allah's glory and wrath were manifested upon them they were engulfed with fear and anxiety, trembled and shed tears, recited phrase of repentance upon their tongue, mentioned their humility and neediness, besought him for His forgiveness and pardon, and requested immunity against divine punishments and Hell's fire.

The reason of such manifestations was divine orders and expediency so that these Allah's noble creatures could be trained in this manner, may be promoted to higher Exalted spiritual stations, and could attain His nearness. Yes! The spiritual training and spiritual positions of those noble personalities

were in Allah's hand, and He himself with such manifestations has carried them upward towards meaningful perfection and Exalted spiritual positions. Didn't we recite in the comprehensive prayer (*Ziyarat al-Jamia*):5

“O' my Masters! Allah's with alternative manifestations of fear and hope (i.e. by revealing His wrath, glory, and beauty), has taken over the control of your heart's training and asceticism in His own hands.”

Yes! The difference in the lifestyles of divine messengers and saints is a matter, which is confirmed by narrations, and anyone who has undertaken some research about the traditions regarding their biographies would be able to appreciate this matter easily. For example: regarding the Holy Prophet [s] it has been reported in traditions that he sometimes said:

“O' Humera (Ayesha)!”

And called Ayesha for companionship or talking, while on the other hand he kept awaiting for prayer time and said to Bilal:

“Comfort me, O' Bilal! (by calling for prayers).”

Sometimes, when revelation were descended upon him, the colour of his face used to change, even he used to be scared during windstorms fearing divine retributions. Does not this explicitly indicate the variations in the behavior of that noble personality? And if it so, how can it be accepted that in all his worships and obedience he does not have any aim except considering Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), as worthy of worship?

The above discussion proves this point that those who said that – the worship should be performed with the only intention that He (Allah) is worthy of worship – is an statement which cannot be accepted, even if it was uttered by the great scholars and mystics with the exception that, those noble ones, with these words would have pursued a matter which is in agreement with their intention of achieving Allah's nearness.

Because, the aim of attaining nearness of the Supreme Reality or Beloved's countenance could be possible without the heart's infatuation with Paradise or fear from Hell's tortures, rather with the intention of considering Him worthy of worship and, thus, striving towards His nearness. And therefore, performance of worship and deeds with this intention, in itself is an evidence and the meanings of that worship and deed, which has been performed with the sole intention of knowing Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), as worthy of adornment as the Commander of the Faithful Imam `Ali [a] has said:

“O' Allah! If I adore you and lower my head in servitude, it is neither because of the heart's infatuation towards Paradise nor because of fear from Hell's fire, rather I worship You because I consider you as worthy of worshipping.”

The above narration emphasizes the same point because, the noble Imam has placed the worship due

to worthiness only in front of worships for the sake of greed or fear and not against all other kind of worships even if performed with the intention of attaining Allah's nearness and achieving his pleasure.

Yes! I beseech Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), to bestow upon me the grace, favour, and strength to worship Him with the intention of attaining His nearness. Furthermore I ask Him to guide us to understand the correct and proper meanings of His nearness and accordingly should strive towards its attainment, so that we are not included among those who consider His nearness as meaningless and impossible. Didn't some of the exalted scholars and jurists consider, although incorrectly, Allah's nearness as meaningless? And said that intention of Allah's nearness could not mean anything except servitude to His commands, otherwise it would be in contradiction with Allah's attributes.

Also, it should not be forgotten that considering worshipping due to greed or fear as futile, even if these words are uttered by some of the learned scholars and gnostics are undesirable and improper, of course, such negligence and blunders from these noble ones are not in disharmony with their exalted academic and mystical ranks because, Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), in accordance with His wisdom and expediency makes them entangled into such negligence and stumbles.

Also, it must be understood that one of the most famous and learned scholar Sayyid Tawus, in his book Iqbal, has regarded those who worship Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), only due to fear from Hell as low. According to his own explanation, these are the people who did not consider Allah as worthy of worship and if there was no fear of Hell, they would not have worshipped Him at all. Of course, such views as Sayyid Tawus has explained, are not correct and those who possess this thinking are indeed low and such Islam and belief are indeed, sick and contaminated.

Also, this must be clarified that a sincere devotee does not look towards anything except his beloved, in addition to that from the point of view of tolerance of hardships, performs the hardest worships, as has been narrated from the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali [a] that if there were two deeds carrying the same reward, he would have selected the harder one. These are the real sincere ones, and may Allah bless them.

5. Classification of Fast observers On the Basis of Their Food Consumption

From the point of view of eating and drinking the fast observers differ as follows:

The fast observers whose eating and drinking is provided through forbidden means are like the ones, who carry the burden of things belonging to others upon their shoulders. The things ultimately reach to their owner and the exhaustion and fatigue remain with these people. The reward of fast of such fast observers is given to the real owners of those eatables or drinks which were illegally consumed by these fast observers, and for them nothing remains except tyranny, wrath, and usurpation of people's wealth.

Or they are like those who undertake pilgrimage to Mecca riding upon an usurped animal, in which case the reward of the Hajj pilgrimage reaches to the owner of that animal and exhaustion and fatigue remain for the usurper.

The fast observers whose eating and drinking consist of doubtful material, (i.e. there being lawful (*halal*)⁶ or unlawful (*haram*)⁷ is not confirmed), could be further classified into two groups:

The first group consists of those fast observers whereby the consumption of such eating and drinking items apparently is lawful (*halal*) for them.

The second group consists of those whose consumption of such eating and drinking items apparently is not lawful (*haram*). These people, with slight variation, are similar to those fast observers whose eating and drinking is provided by unlawful (*haram*) means.

The fast observers whose eating and drinking consist of lawful (*halal*) means, but are excessive in their consumption in quality as well as in quantity. That is they fill their tablecloth with colourful delicious dishes at dawn (*Suhur*) and at the time of fast breaking (*iftar*), and in their consumption of these foods indulge in over-eating.

Their story resembles that of a low ambitious miserly person who in the presence of his beloved amuses himself with something else, while his beloved desires that his lover should pay attention only towards him, and should enjoy his companionship. Such low ambitious miserly ones do not possess the decency and worthiness to be invited for the union with their beloved, they deserve only to be amused in their petty amusements. Because, these are the slaves of their stomachs and not the bondsmen of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). It would be more appropriate to consider them as worshippers of belly instead of calling them as Allah's worshippers.

The fast observers, who in their qualitative and quantitative consumption of eatables go further deeper as compared to the previous group, reaching to the level of extravagance. Their situation is similar to those fast observers whose eating and drinking consist of unlawful (*haram*) means because, lavishness and extravagance is forbidden and is tantamount to a sin. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to consider them as disobedient and sinners, instead of knowing them as obedient bondsmen of Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

5. The fast observers whose eating and drinking as well as their level of consumption consist of lawful (*halal*) and is permissible; are not indulged in any sort of waste and extravagance; neither they fill their tablecloth with colourful delicious dishes nor they practice over-eating and belly-filling; limit themselves to consume only a single food and abstain themselves from eating with the intention of enjoyment; Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), will reward them with best of His bounties; with His infinite generosity will bless them, and no one knows or could imagine what sort of special rewards have been accumulated for them by Him.

6. Classification of Fast observers On the Basis of Eating at Dawn (Suhur) and Fast-breaking (Iftar)

Fast observers from the point of view of their intention (*niyyat*) for eating at dawn (*Suhur*) and fast breaking (*iftar*) may be classified as follows:

1. Those who do not make any special intention for eating *Suhur* and *iftar* and simply eat to enjoy the food taste as well as to make up for the hunger during the fasting.
2. Those who eat *Suhur* and *iftar* with the intention of enjoying the food taste and make up for the hunger, but at the same time with the intention that eating *Suhur* and *iftar* are recommended (*mustahab*) and help a person in his worshipping.
3. Those who eat *Suhur* and *iftar* because, it is recommended, Allah likes it, and it helps a person in worshipping, but in addition to that also pay due regard to special etiquette and instructions about *Suhur* and *iftar* – etiquette such as recital of Holy Qur'an, engaging in special supplications before, after, and during *Suhur* and *iftar*, and praising and thanking Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

7. Etiquette of Eating at Dawn (Suhur) and Fast-breaking (Iftar)

One of the most important etiquette and instruction is the recital of Surah al-Qadr (Power) before taking *Suhur* and *iftar* as well as recital of illustrious and illuminated supplication:

“Allahuma rabb al-nur al-adheem” (Allah is the possessor of great illumination)

which has been given book of Iqbal written by the most esteemed and famous scholar Sayyid ibn Tawus. About this supplication it has been narrated from Imam al-Sadiq [a] that the Holy Prophet [s] has recommended recital of this prayer to Commander of the Faithful [s] Imam 'Ali [a] and said that Archangel Gabriel came to me and said:

“Whoever in the Holy Month of Ramadhan before iftar recites this prayer, Allah answers his prayer, accepts his prayer and fasting, grants his ten requirements, forgives his sins, removes his grief, makes his heart at ease, grants his wishes, makes his deeds to ascend upward with the deeds of prophets and righteous saints, and on the Day of Judgement brings him to His presence with a face illuminated like bright moon.”

Comment

It becomes conspicuous from the narrations that fasting does not mean only abstinence from eating and drinking rather it also means renunciation of sins. Because, some of the sins like backbiting, lying, lustful sight, cursing, and oppression – be it less or more – would break the fast like the eating and drinking.

Therefore, it is up to the fast observers to abstain from all the above, and during fast must endeavour so that eye, ear, tongue, hands, feet, and other bodily parts all together must observe fasting and should abstain themselves from performance of those acts which should not be performed, even they should avoid over-talking and should practice silence lest their fasting days do not have any difference with other days except eating and drinking, and they should not forget the words of the Holy Prophet [s], who has said:

“Renunciation of eating and drinking is the easiest thing – which has been made compulsory upon the fast observers.”

And if, the scholars and jurists consider the fasting of someone who has committed a portion of these sins – as correct, it is from this consideration that what they meant with this correctness of this fast is from the point of view of make up fasting (i.e. for some one, like this, it is not obligatory that after the Holy Month of Ramadhan he must repeat these fasts as makeup fasting).

But what is meant with the correctness of fasting in traditions is – their acceptance by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted). And in many cases a fast observer may undertake a fast in such a manner that in accordance with the religious decrees of a jurist it would not be obligatory upon him to offer make-up (*qadha*) fast, but it may be that such fast would not have been acceptable by Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted).

The correct and perfect fast which Allah (the Glorious, the Exalted), has made obligatory for the self-perfection and spiritual ascent of fast observers, inevitably must be accompanied with abstinence from all bodily sins. Apart from that it would be much better if the fast observer in addition to renunciation of bodily sins should also practice abstinence from sins of the heart, i.e. should prevent the heart from any other remembrance except Allah's, and should renounce everything except Allah which is the most superior and esteemed fast.

Some one who has truly discovered the reality, virtues, and wisdom of fasting inevitably should abstain from all sort of sins and transgression for the sake of fast's acceptance, otherwise on the Judgement Day he would be questioned why his eyes, ears, tongue, and other bodily parts did not observe fasting? And simply quitting eating and drinking which would relieve him from undertaking make-up fasting (*qadha*) in this world, would not make him immune from scrutiny and Allah's punishment on the Judgement Day.

1. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ibn Abu Talib [a]: was the first perfect exemplar of the teachings of the Most Noble Messenger [s]. 'Ali was raised by him from early childhood and followed him like a shadow until the very end of the latter's life. He was like a moth before the prophetic flame; the final moment when he was separated from the Most Noble Messenger [s] was when he embraced his corpse and laid it to rest.

'Ali [a] was the first person after the Most Noble Messenger [s] to approach spiritual realities in the manner of philosophical reflection, that is, by free exercise of reason. He used many technical terms and laid out and organized the rules of Arabic grammar in order to protect the Holy Qur'an from copyist's errors.

The exact scholarship, spiritual culture, and consideration of ethical, social, political, and even mathematical problems shown in 'Ali's [a] discourses, letters, and other documents that have reached us are astonishing. The wealth of these documents makes 'Ali [a] the best known individual among Muslims to have a full realization of the sublime goals of the Holy Qur'an and the critical and practical concepts of Islam as they should be realized.

They testify to the soundness of the prophetic saying: "I am the city of knowledge, and 'Ali is its gate." Furthermore, he combined this knowledge with action. In short, 'Ali's outstanding character is beyond description, and his virtues are innumerable. Never in history has someone's character drawn the attention of the world's scholars and thinkers to such an extent [Tr].

2. dhikr: inducing or maintaining a state of Allah's awareness, especially by means of vocal or silent recitation of his Supreme Names. For details see Ayatullah Ibrahim Amini's Book: Self Building, pp. 277–284 [Tr].

3. Imam al-Sadiq [a] (83/699–148/765): the son of the fifth Imam, he lived in an increasingly favourable climate and was able to teach openly in Madina. Large numbers of scholars gathered around him to learn, including such famous Sunni figures as Imam Abu Hanifah, the founder of the one of the four Sunni schools of law.

Towards the end of Imam Ja'far's life severe restrictions were placed upon his activities, as a result of growing Shi'ite unrest. More traditions are recorded from him than from all the other Imams together. He is so important for Twelve-Imam Shi'ite law that it is named the Ja'fari School after him. He is buried in the Baqi Cemetery in Madina. Ja'far's fame for religious learning was great, greater than that of his father or of any other Twelver Imam except for 'Ali bin Abu Talib [a] himself, perhaps the earliest historical reference presenting Ja'far as one of the most respected and highly esteemed personalities of his epoch, and as having profound knowledge and learning, is Ya'qubi's statement that it was customary for scholars who related anything from him to say: "the learned one informed us".

Even the famous jurist of Medina, Imam Malik bin Anas, is reported to have said, when quoting Ja'far's traditions: "the Thiqa (truthful) himself told me that..." Similar compliments for Ja'far are attributed to the Imam Imam Abu Hanifah, who is also reported to have been his pupil. Al-Sadiq's [a] knowledge was great in religion and culture, he was fully informed in Philosophy, he attained great piety in the world, and he abstained entirely from lusts. He lived in Madina long enough to greatly profit the sect that followed him, and to give his friends the advantage of the hidden sciences [Tr].

4. Some of the Islamic traditions about some of the Sinless Imams [a] have mentioned that while remembering Hell's horrible punishments they fainted, [Author].

5. For Ziyarat al-Jamiah refer to the book Prayers and Supplications selected from Mafatih al-Jinan, Zad ul-M'ad and Almanac p. 654 [Tr]

6. Halal: things which are allowable by religious law.[Tr]

7. Haram: categorically forbidden by religious law [Tr].

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