

Right n. 11: The Right of Fasting

حق الصوم

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الصَّوْمِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ حِجَابٌ ضَرَبَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى لِسَانِكَ وَسَمْعِكَ وَبَصَرِكَ وَفَرْجِكَ وَبَطْنِكَ لِيَسْتُرَكَ بِهِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَهَكَذَا جَاءَ فِي الْحَدِيثِ «الصَّوْمُ جُنَّةٌ مِنَ النَّارِ» فَإِنْ سَكَنْتَ أَطْرَافَكَ فِي حَجَبَتِهَا رَجَوْتَ أَنْ تَكُونَ مَحْجُوبًا. وَإِنْ أَنْتَ تَرَكَتَهَا تَضْطَرِبُ فِي حِجَابِهَا وَتَرْفَعُ جَنْبَاتِ الْحِجَابِ فَتُطَّلِعُ إِلَى مَا لَيْسَ لَهَا بِالنَّظَرِ الدَّاعِيَةِ لِلشَّهْوَةِ وَالقُوَّةِ الْخَارِجَةِ عَنْ حَدِّ التَّقِيَّةِ لِلَّهِ لَمْ تَأْمَنْ أَنْ تَخْرِقَ الْحِجَابَ وَتَخْرُجَ مِنْهُ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

And the right of fasting is that you should know it is a veil, which God has set up over your tongue, your hearing and your sight, your private parts and your stomach, to protect you from the Fire. This meaning is asserted in the tradition: “Fasting is a shield against the Fire.” Thus if your parts become tranquil within the veil of fasting, you have hopes of being protected.¹ But if you leave them agitated behind the veil and let them lift the sides of the veil, so they look at things that are not lawful for them to look at that incite lust and powers that are beyond the limits of being God-fearing, you will not be safe from tearing through the veil and coming out of it. And there is no power but in God.

The Philosophy behind Fasting

Since sins are usually committed via the tongue, the eyes, the ears, the stomach or the unleashing of sexual desires, Imam Sajjad considers the philosophy behind fasting to be restraining oneself from

committing sins. The Imam considers fasting to provide a veil over our body parts that will prevent them from engaging in sin. The Qur'an expresses the same philosophy behind fasting in the following verse:

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

"O' ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint." [The Holy Qur'an, al--Baqarah 2: 183]

We see that self-restraint has been stated to be the main reason behind fasting. Fasting implies self-restraint. It has also been used for abstaining from talking as we read in the following verse in which the Blessed Mary has been ordered not to talk in the form of a fast:

فَكُلِّي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا فَإِمَّا تَرِينَّ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ
صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أُكَلِّمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنْسِيًّا

"So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man, say, 'I have vowed a fast to (God) Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being'" [The Holy Qur'an, Maryam 19:26]

Fasting before Islam

From the verse Baqarah 2: 183 that was cited above we can also conclude that fasting is not limited to Muslims and it has been prescribed for those before us. It is most probable that the similarity is only in its prescription for the religions that came before Islam, not in its number of days or time of fasting.

Fasting in the Old Testament

We read the following in the Old Testament regarding fasting:

وَكَانَ هُنَاكَ عِنْدَ الرَّبِّ أَرْبَعِينَ نَهَارًا وَأَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً لَمْ يَأْكُلْ خُبْزًا وَلَمْ يَشْرَبْ مَاءً.
فَكَتَبَ عَلَى اللُّوحَيْنِ كَلِمَاتِ الْعَهْدِ الْكَلِمَاتِ الْعَشْرَ.

"And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water.

And he wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”² [The Old Testament, Exodus 34:28]

Fasting in the New Testament

We read the following in the New Testament regarding fasting:

ثُمَّ أَصْعَدَ يَسُوعُ إِلَى الْبَرِّيَّةِ مِنَ الرُّوحِ لِيُجَرَّبَ مِنْ إِبْلِيسَ. فَبَعْدَ مَا صَامَ أَرْبَعِينَ نَهَاراً وَأَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً جَاعَ آخِيراً.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” [The New Testament, Matthew 4: 1–2]

Fasting of the Disciples

We read the following in the New Testament regarding fasting by the disciples:

وَقَالُوا لَهُ: «لِمَاذَا يَصُومُ تَلَامِيذُ يُوحَنَّا كَثِيراً وَيُقَدِّمُونَ طَلِبَاتٍ وَكَذَلِكَ تَلَامِيذُ الْفَرِيسِيِّينَ أَيْضاً وَأَمَّا تَلَامِيذُكَ فَيَأْكُلُونَ وَيَشْرَبُونَ؟» فَقَالَ لَهُمْ: «أَتَقْدِرُونَ أَنْ تَجْعَلُوا بَنِي الْعُرْسِ يَصُومُونَ مَا دَامَ الْعَرِيسُ مَعَهُمْ؟ وَلَكِنْ سَتَأْتِي أَيَّامٌ حِينَ يُرْفَعُ الْعَرِيسُ عَنْهُمْ فَحِينَئِذٍ يَصُومُونَ فِي تِلْكَ الْأَيَّامِ»

“And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.”³ [Luke, 5:33–35]

From the above we can conclude that they fasted too. The number forty is also expressed, but it is not clear how they fasted.⁴

The Period of Fasting in the Qur’an

Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى
الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مَسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا
خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

“(Fasting) for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it (with hardship), is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent. But he that will give more, of his own free will, – it is better for him. And it is better for you that ye fast, if ye only knew.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2: 184]

There are two opinions regarding the meaning of “a fixed number of days.” Some consider it to mean three days from each month. Ibn `Abbas adds the fasting on the day of Ashura⁵ to it. Some consider this fasting to be recommended. Others consider it to be obligatory.

Other commentators have interpreted this to refer to the month of Ramadan.⁶ The majority of the interpreters of the Holy Qur’an accept this view. They say that God briefly expresses fasting to be for one or two days, and then says it is for a fixed number of days, that is the month of Ramadan. We can also understand from this verse that fasting is obligatory for those who are not ill or on a journey. When ill or on a journey, one should not fast. However, one should compensate by feeding the poor. Abdul Rahman quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

الصَّائِمُ فِي السَّفَرِ كَالْمُفْطِرِ فِي الْحَضَرِ.

“One who fasts while on a journey is like one who breaks his fast while he is at home.”⁷

It has been narrated on the authority of Imam Sadiq :

الصَّائِمُ فِي شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ فِي السَّفَرِ كَالْمُفْطِرِ فِيهِ فِي الْحَضَرِ.

“One who fasts during the month of Ramadan while he is on a journey is like one who is at home and breaks his fast.”⁸

In the interpretation of the above verse, we read in Majma’ al-Bayan: Ayashi quoted Muhammad ibn Muslim on the authority of Imam Sadiq that the Prophet never fasted while on a journey. Then this verse was revealed one day at noon when they were in a place called Kara ul-Ghameem. The Prophet asked for a bowl of water, drank some, and ordered the people to drink too. Some of the people said: “It is near

the end of the day. It is better to complete our fast.” Then the Prophet called them sinners. They were called sinners until the time of the death of the Prophet .

The Meaning of the Word ‘Ramadan’

The root of the word ‘Ramadan’ in Arabic is ‘ramaz’ that implies strong shining of the rays of the Sun on pebbles. The Arabs named the various months according to the conditions at the time in which they occurred. The month of fasting was coincident with the peak of the heat. Another account states that Ramadan is one of the Names of God. That is why we are instructed not to refer to the month of fasting as ‘Ramadan’ but ‘the month of Ramadan.’ In yet a third account, the month of fasting is called Ramadan because it burns away the sins.

Fasting and Patience

The Qur’an has interpreted fasting as patience. There is a tradition in which Imam Sadiq has been quoted to have said the following in the interpretation of the Almighty God’s statement “Seek help from patience and prayer”: What is meant by patience is fasting. When something really hard descends upon man, he should fast since God the Almighty says “seek help from patience” – that is fasting.”⁹ The late Majlisi has said the following in Mir’atul Uqool: The main part of fasting is imprisonment. Fasting is called patience because it imprisons one and restrains him from eating, drinking and love-making.”¹⁰

Traditions on the Nobility of Fasting and Its Effects

We can get a better understanding of the nobility of fasting and its importance by reviewing some of the relevant traditions. Zurarah quoted on the authority of Imam Baqir :

بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسَةِ أَشْيَاءٍ: عَلَى الصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَالْحَجِّ وَالصَّوْمِ وَالْوَلَايَةِ.

“There are five pillars for Islam: praying, paying the alms-tax, the holy pilgrimage, fasting and the friendship (of the Commander of the Faithful and the leaders that came after him).”¹¹

Majlisi said: These may be contemporary things since Islam is shaky without them. Believing in these is a part of Islam. It is also probable that what is meant by friendship is love of the Imams in addition to a belief in them. Isma’il ibn Abi Ziyad quoted on the authority of Imam Sadiq on the authority of his grandfathers that the Prophet told his companions:

أَلَا أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ فَعَلْتُمُوهُ تَبَاعَدَ الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْكُمْ كَمَا تَبَاعَدَ الْمَشْرِقُ مِنْ

المَغْرِب؟ قالوا: بلى. قال: الصَّوْمُ يُسَوِّدُ وَجْهَهُ وَالصَّدَقَةُ تَكْسِرُ ظَهْرَهُ وَالْحُبُّ فِي
اللَّهِ وَالْمُؤَاظَرَةُ عَلَى الْعَمَلِ الصَّالِحِ تَقْطَعُ دَابِرَهُ وَالِاسْتِغْفَارُ يَقْطَعُ وَتَيْنَهُ، وَلِكُلِّ
شَيْءٍ زَكَاةٌ وَزَكَاةُ الْأَبْدَانِ الصِّيَامُ.

*“Do you want me to tell you what you can do that will cause Satan to go as far away from you as the East is from the West?” They said: “O Prophet of God! Yes.” He said: “Fasting blackens Satan’s face. Giving charity breaks his back, love for the sake of God and helping in doing good deeds roots him out, and repentance cuts off his aorta. There is an alms tax for everything, and the alms of the body is fasting.”*¹²

The late Majlisi considers this a reliable tradition. Ibn Abi Amir quoted on the authority of some of the companions, on the authority of Imam Sadiq : Almighty God revealed to Moses : What has prevented you from supplicating to Me? He said: The bad smell of my mouth since I am fasting. God the Almighty revealed:

يَا مُوسَى! لَخُلُوفُ فَمِ الصَّائِمِ أَطْيَبُ عِنْدِي مِنْ رِيحِ الْمِسْكِ.

*O Moses! The odour of the mouth of one who is fasting is more agreeable to Me than the fragrance of musk.”*¹³

In another tradition, we read that the Prophet of God said:

الصَّوْمُ جُنَّةٌ مِنَ النَّارِ.

*“Fasting is a shield against the Fire.”*¹⁴

Fasting and the Forgiveness of Sins

Imam Baqir said: God’s Prophet told Jabir ibn Abdullah:

يَا جَابِرُ! هَذَا شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ؛ مَنْ صَامَ نَهَارَهُ وَقَامَ وَرَدًا مِنْ لَيْلِهِ وَعَفَّ بَطْنَهُ
وَفَرَجَهُ وَكَفَّ لِسَانَهُ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوبِهِ كَخُرُوجِهِ مِنَ الشَّهْرِ. فَقَالَ جَابِرُ: يَا رَسُولَ
اللَّهِ! مَا أَحْسَنَ هَذَا الْحَدِيثَ. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: يَا جَابِرُ! وَمَا

أَشَدَّ هَذِهِ الشُّرُوطِ.

O Jabir! This is the month of Ramadan. Whoever fasts during its days, stands in prayer in its nights, keeps his stomach and his private parts away from what is unlawful, and restrains his tongue shall leave all his sins behind as he leaves this month.” Jabir said: “O Prophet of God! How beautiful are these words.” The Prophet said: “O Jabir! And how difficult are these conditions.”¹⁵

Imam Sajjad also mentioned these. In another tradition from the Prophet the condition for fasting to be considered as worship is stated to be not gossiping.”¹⁶

Fasting and the Equality between the Rich and the Poor

It is quoted upon the authority of Imam Sadiq :

إِنَّمَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ الصِّيَامَ لِيَسْتَوِيَ بِهِ الْغَنِيُّ وَالْفَقِيرُ، وَذَلِكَ أَنَّ الْغَنِيَّ لَمْ يَكُنْ لِيَجِدَ
مَسَّ الْجُوعِ فَيَرْحَمَ الْفَقِيرَ لِأَنَّ الْغَنِيَّ كُلَّمَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا قَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ، فَأَرَادَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ
وَجَلَّ أَنْ يُسَوِّيَ بَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ وَأَنْ يُذِيقَ الْغَنِيَّ نَيْلَ الْجُوعِ وَالْأَلَمِ لِيَرْقَّ عَلَى الضَّعِيفِ
وَيَرْحَمَ الْجَائِعَ.

“God made fasting obligatory so that the rich and the poor are made equal. If there were no fasting, the rich would never experience the feeling of hunger that would make them have mercy on the poor, for whenever the rich desire something they are able to acquire it. Thus God desired to place His servants on the same level, and that the rich experience hunger and pain so that they have compassion for the weak and have mercy on the hungry.”¹⁷

We see in this tradition that one of the philosophies behind fasting in the month of Ramadan is to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor people. Wealth has always divided human societies into two classes – the rich and the poor. The rich who possess means of comfort and convenience can never realize the hardships and pains suffered by the poor and experience what they go through. When one fasts, he gets hungry and thirsty. His human emotions get aroused and he starts to think of ways to help those who are hungry. It is interesting to note that according to Islamic jurisprudence no rich man can pay a poor man to fast instead of him. This clearly shows the purpose behind fasting.

Fasting as Viewed by Imam Ali

There are several views about fasting expressed by Imam Ali that are recorded in *Nahjul Balaghah*. For example, he said:

وَزَكَاةُ الْبَدَنِ الصِّيَامُ.

*“The alms tax of the body is fasting.”*¹⁸

We know that taxing implies growth, development and purification. Here the Imam has referred to the health-related aspect of fasting. In another place he said:

وَصَوْمُ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ فَإِنَّهُ جَنَّةٌ مِنَ الْعِقَابِ.

*“Fasting in the month of Ramadan is a shield against the chastisement.”*¹⁹

In another place he said:

خُمْصُ الْبُطُونِ مِنَ الصِّيَامِ ذُبْلُ الشِّفَاهِ مِنَ الدُّعَاءِ صَفْرُ الْأُورَانِ مِنَ السَّهْرِ عَلَى
وُجُوهِهِمْ غَبْرَةٌ الْخَاشِعِينَ، أَوْلِيكَ إِخْوَانِي الذَّاهِبُونَ.

*“They were those whose stomachs were slim due to fasting, their lips were dry from (continuous) supplications, their faces were pale from staying up at night, and their faces were covered with the dust of humbleness. They were my brothers who are gone now.”*²⁰

In another of Imam Ali’s wise sayings we read:

الصِّيَامُ ابْتِلَاءٌ لِإِخْلَاصِ الْخَلْقِ.

*“Fasting is a trial of people’s sincerity.”*²¹

In another of Imam Ali’s wise sayings we read that on the day of celebration, he said:

إِنَّمَا هُوَ عِيدٌ لِمَنْ قَبِلَ اللَّهُ صِيَامَهُ وَشَكَرَ قِيَامَهُ، وَكُلُّ يَوْمٍ لَا يُعْصَى اللَّهُ فِيهِ فَهُوَ
عِيدٌ.

“It is only a day of celebration (Eid) for those whose fasting God accepts and whose standing up in

prayer (at night) He rewards. Every day in which one does not disobey God is a day of celebration.”²²

In some of his advice he said:

أوصيكم وجميع ولدي... وصلاح ذات البين

“I advise you and my children.... to improve your social affairs, since its reward is more than that of praying and fasting.”²³

Fasting Without Any Gains

Imam Ali said:

كَمْ مِنْ صَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ مِنْ صِيَامِهِ إِلَّا الْجُوعُ وَالظَّمَأُ، وَكَمْ مِنْ قَائِمٍ لَيْسَ لَهُ إِلَّا
السَّهْرُ وَالْعَنَاءُ. حَبَّذَا نَوْمُ الْأَكْيَاسِ وَإِفْطَارُهُمْ.

“There are many who fast and gain nothing from their fasting other than suffering from thirst and hunger. Many stay up at night in prayer and gain nothing but sleeplessness and fatigue. How beautiful is the sleeping of the wise, and the breaking of their fasts!”²⁴

In the well-known sermon called Qasi’ah, Imam Ali discussed the bad ending of being entrapped by Satan’s plots, and pointed out factors that can save man.

و عَنْ ذَلِكَ مَا حَرَسَ اللَّهُ عِبَادَهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَ مُجَاهِدَةِ الصِّيَامِ
فِي الْأَيَّامِ الْمَفْرُوضَاتِ تَسْكِينًا لِأَطْرَافِهِمْ وَتَخْشِيعًا لِأَبْصَارِهِمْ وَتَذْلِيلًا لِأَنْفُسِهِمْ
وَ تَخْفِيزًا لِقُلُوبِهِمْ وَإِذْهَابًا لِلْخِيَلَاءِ عَنْهُمْ وَلِإِذَا فِي ذَلِكَ مِنْ تَعْفِيرِ عِتَاقِ الْوُجُوهِ
تَوَاضُعًا وَالتَّصَاقِ كَرَائِمِ الْجَوَارِحِ بِالْأَرْضِ تَصَاغِرًا وَلِحُوقِ الْبُطُونِ بِالْمُتُونِ مِنَ
الصِّيَامِ تَذُلًا.

“God protects his believing servants from that (Satan’s plots) through praying, paying the alms-tax, striving to fast during the days that fasting is prescribed since these acts will give tranquility to their limbs and hinder them from engaging in sin. They will cause humbleness of the eyes and control of the wild self. They will cause humbleness of the heart and eliminate undue pride and haughtiness. That will be

due to tender cheeks being rubbed in the dust out of humility, the most precious limbs cleaving to the earth in abjectness and stomachs adhering to their backs because of fasting in abasement (before God).”²⁵

It is said that once an Arab who was riding a camel in the desert ran into a man who was praying. His praying fooled the Arab. He got off his camel, sat down next to him and said: “How well do you pray!” The man said: “You do not know. I am also fasting.” The man’s praying and fasting fooled the Arab, and he entrusted his camel to him. When he returned he saw neither the man nor his camel. He felt sorry and realized that he should not have been fooled by the man’s praying and fasting, and should not have entrusted his camel to him.²⁶

Now that we have studied the various effects of fasting as expressed by Imam Ali let us see what the master of the jurisprudents, Sheikh Muhammad Hasan who is the author of Jawahir ul-Kalam, has said about the positive effects of fasting in the chapter on fasting. He said: “It has been narrated that God the Almighty said:

الصَّوْمُ لِي وَأَنَا أُجَازِي بِهِ.

Fasting is for Me, and I will reward it (even though I Myself am the reward for fasting).

He added: “The reason it is said that fasting is for God is that it is a private issue which only God knows about. This is opposed to praying that is visible by the people. It is also because through fasting, our physical strength reduces while our intellect and the various faculties are strengthened. Thus we can attain the more precise divine points, heavenly knowledge and the desirable perfections.”²⁷

The Effects of Fasting as Viewed by Ghazali

Abu Hamed said: “Fasting is for the sake of God and has an especial nobility. Although all forms of worship are this way, there are two points specific about fasting. They are as follows:

1 Fasting is a form of abstaining that is private. It is a secret that others do not see unlike other forms of worship that are seen in public. No one but God knows about fasting, since it is a personal action done with patience.

2 Fasting is a form of self-restraint that is the greatest blow to God’s enemy. This is because lust is the tool of Satan. Eating and drinking strengthen lust. That is why God’s Prophet said:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَيَجْرِي مِنْ ابْنِ آدَمَ مَجْرَى الدَّمِ فَضَيِّقُوا مَجَارِيَهُ بِالْجُوعِ.

“Satan flows through man’s body just like blood. Block off the roaming grounds of Satan via hunger.”²⁸

Hunger derived through fasting breaks down Satan and acts as a stronghold against him. Whoever defeats Satan has assisted God. This assistance is related to granting success by God since God has said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَنصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

“O ye who believe! If ye will aid (the cause of) God, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly.”

[The Holy Qur’an, Muhammad 47:7]

God also said:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily God is with those who do right.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Ankabut 29:69]

In another verse God said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ

“Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls).” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Ra’d 13:11]

The change mentioned in this verse is the elimination of lusts, since lusts are the means by which Satan influences man. We cannot discover the Grandeur of God as long as Satan influences us through our lusts. God’s Prophet said:

لَوْ لَا أَنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ يَحُومُونَ عَلَى قُلُوبِ بَنِي آدَمَ لَنَظَرُوا إِلَى مَلَكَوتِ السَّمَاءِ.

“If Satans were not hovering around the hearts of the descendants of Adam, men could look at the kingdom of the heavens.”²⁹

Fasting and Health

One of the philosophies behind fasting is health. Before considering the positive effects of fasting on our health, let us see through what ways illnesses affect our health. God's Prophet said:

المَعِدَةُ بَيْتُ كُلِّ دَاءٍ وَالْحَمِيَةُ رَأْسُ كُلِّ دَوَاءٍ

*"The stomach is the home of every illness, and abstinence (from food) is the chief of all medicine."*³⁰

Imam Kazim said:

الْحَمِيَةُ رَأْسُ كُلِّ دَوَاءٍ وَالْمَعِدَةُ بَيْتُ الْأَدْوَاءِ.

*"Abstinence is the chief of every remedy and the stomach is the home of illnesses."*³¹

He also said:

لَيْسَ مِنْ دَوَاءٍ إِلَّا وَيُهَيِّجُ دَاءً وَلَيْسَ فِي الْبَدَنِ أَنْفَعُ مِنْ إِمْسَاكِ الْيَدِ إِلَّا عَمَّا يَحْتَاجُ إِلَيْهِ.

*"There is no medicine that does not stir up an illness, and nothing is more beneficial for the body than withholding from it all except what it requires."*³²

God's Prophet said:

صُومُوا تَصِحُّوا.

*"Fast, and you will be healthy."*³³

We read in these traditions from the Prophet of God and the seventh Imam who have divine knowledge that the stomach is the home of all illnesses and we can get healthy by abstaining from eating. Al-Asbagh ibn Nubatah narrated that he heard the Commander of the Faithful advise his son Imam Hasan as follows: "O' my son! Do you want me to teach you a practice that will make you needless of doctors?"

Imam Hasan said: “Yes.” The Commander of the Faithful said that the Prophet said:

لَا تَجْلِسْ عَلَى الطَّعَامِ إِلَّا وَأَنْتَ جَائِعٌ، وَلَا تَقُمْ عَنِ الطَّعَامِ إِلَّا وَأَنْتَ تَشْتَهِيهِ، وَجَوِّدِ
الْمَضْغَ، وَإِذَا نِمْتَ فَأَعْرِضْ نَفْسَكَ عَلَى الْخَلَاءِ، فَإِذَا اسْتَعْمَلْتَ هَذَا اسْتَغْنَيْتَ عَنِ
الطَّبِّ.

“Do not sit down to eat unless you are hungry. Cease eating while you still have some appetite to eat. Chew your food thoroughly. Go to the toilet before you sleep. If you adhere to these you will not need medical treatment.” 34

This tradition also shows that overeating is the root of all illnesses.

Unorderly Food Intake and Orderly Excretions

The skin, the liver, the kidneys and the lungs are all orderly body parts. Our kidneys even know that we should not be awakened at night in order to urinate. The kidneys reduce their secretions to lower the production of urine depending on the stage of our sleep and the darkness of the room. The skin, the lungs and the liver are similar.

However, our intake is so unorderly that even sometimes instead of taking in good and useful things we let in smoke, dust and alcohol. This will pressurize our metabolism beyond its ultimate strength and finally make us ill. The body is like a reservoir of what we eat and drink. Many organs are constantly at work trying to excrete the poisonous material in our body. They need a chance to catch up with our unorderly intake. Fasting is the perfect means to give our body a chance to get rid of the poisons within it.³⁵

The Glands

Consider the following points regarding the glands:

- 1) The functions of the glands are interrelated. If one reduces to secrete some hormone, then the functioning of the other glands will be messed up.
- 2) The hypothalamus is one of the most important glands whose functioning is highly related to the functioning of the suprarenal glands.³⁶
- 3) The hormones produced by the adrenal (suprarenal) glands³⁷ are very important. They can affect all the cells of our body. Any overeating or eating bad things can have bad effects on the functioning of the hypothalamus.

- 4) It has been proven that the pancreas³⁸ and the adrenal glands have an important role on longevity.
- 5) A close relationship between the functioning of the pancreas gland and the adrenal glands has been proven.
- 6) It has been proven that as we age there is a reduction in the production of the hormones secreted by the pancreas,³⁹ but aging does not affect the hormones secreted by the adrenal glands.
- 7) Vladimir Nikitin who is a professor of biochemistry experimented on rats for many years. He proved that by keeping them hungry through especial means he could extend their life expectancy from 2.5 years to 4.5 years. He believes that when the adrenal glands are kept hungry, they themselves eat up their excess hormones that cause an imbalance. Thus fasting can re-establish our hormonal balance for a while if for some reason our hormones are out of balance.⁴⁰

Studies on Metabolism

It is thought that whatever we eat is burnt to produce energy for our body and the excess is let out. This is not a correct image of the way our body works. Our body is not like a pond in which food enters from one side, and leaves from the other side. What enters our body must be fresh, but what leaves it is old. The oxygen that enters our body now will leave our body six months later. The same holds true for calcium. If radioactive nitrogen is added to our food, it will appear in the urine several weeks later.

Therefore, we should not expect an instant replacement of the old food in the body with fresh food that we eat. We must wait many days to achieve this. Dr. John Feromozan said: The stored amount of glycogen stored in the kidneys and protein in the blood and fat stored in the body is 30% for men and 20% for women. This amount is sufficient for one month.

Dr. Alexis Carrel in his book *Man the Unknown Creature* said the following about fasting: “When you fast, the sugar in the blood pours into the kidneys, the fat stored under the skin, the proteins stored in the muscles, the glands and the kidney cells are released and used up.” When we consider both of these statements we conclude that our body is totally repaired after thirty days of fasting and it gets totally rid itself of poisons and old materials.⁴¹

Fasting and Ulcers

It is a common misunderstanding that fasting causes ulcers. If it was so, then we should ask why the statistics show more cases of ulcers among the non-Muslim nations who do not fast compared to the Muslim nations. If ulcers were only common among Muslims, then we could suspect a relationship between fasting and ulcers existed. However, this is not the case and there is a growing trend of ulcers in the West. If fasting was a cause of ulcers and given the more than fourteen centuries of fasting by Muslims, ulcers should have become a hereditary disease among the Muslims. However, this is not the

Causes of Ulcers

The causes of ulcers were investigated in an international conference on diseases of the stomach in September 1966 in Tokyo. Those who attended presented their country's medical results as to the causes of ulcers. Among these reports, the following were the most common causes of ulcers:

- 1) Smoking.
- 2) Eating many hot foods.
- 3) Drinking too much water.
- 4) Usual use of coffee and spices.
- 5) Excessive use of salty or sour foods.
- 6) Drinking alcoholic beverages.

The representative from Turkey who attended this conference reported that after the end of the month of fasting it has been found that fasting accelerates this disease. This implies that fasting does not cause ulcers, but if the person is prone to get an ulcer fasting will speed it up. That is why Islam has instructed those who are ill or know that they will get ill if they fast should not fast. Their fasting is postponed to a later time.

Alexi Soforin's Medical Fasting

When we eat various foods, some of it passes through the digestive system but is not used up by the cells. It gets stored up under the skin, around the heart and around important body organs. These will cause infections after some time and result in various ailments. The more the excess food, the worse the infection will be. The illnesses have different names, but are all rooted in microbes or viruses that live where there exists excess food. Before any treatment, we must get rid of the trash.

This is only feasible if we do not give our body any food and only drink water. The body will then automatically extract the stored food and get rid of it. Then the disease will be uprooted and show signs of treatment. This method will naturally cleanse the body. If we use other methods and take drugs, the drugs will also affect the healthy cells in our body, and our body will react to the drugs. However, fasting does not have any side effects. Also, note that this is a single treatment for all illnesses.⁴³

So far, we have discussed the views of doctors about ways to treat illnesses. We saw that abstaining and fasting is an important part of this treatment, even the last one. Therefore, God who created us made fasting obligatory so that we derive both spiritual and physical benefits from it. We mentioned

earlier that Imam Sajjad stressed the importance of controlling our various organs and directing them in a good way while fasting.

The Secrets of Fasting

The scholars have mentioned three ranks for fasting. The first rank for fasting is just restraining the stomach from eating and drinking, and restraining our sexual desires. The second rank for fasting implies the additional restraining of our ears, eyes, hands, feet and other organs. Imam Sadiq said:

إِذَا صُمْتَ فَلْيَصُمْ سَمْعُكَ وَبَصْرُكَ وَشَعْرُكَ وَجِلْدُكَ وَ...

“When you fast your hearing, your sight, your hair, your skin and other organs should also fast.”

لَا يَكُنْ يَوْمٌ صَوْمِكَ كَيَوْمِ فِطْرِكَ.

“The day of your fasting should not be like the day that you do not fast.”

In another tradition he said:

وَدَعَ الْمِرَاءَ وَأَذَى الْخَادِمِ وَلَيْكُنْ عَلَيْكَ وَقَارُ الصِّيَامِ فَإِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ سَمِعَ امْرَأَةً تَسُبُّ جَارِيَتَهَا وَهِيَ صَائِمَةٌ فَدَعَى بِطَعَامٍ فَقَالَ لَهَا: كُلِي. فَقَالَتْ: إِنِّي صَائِمَةٌ. قَالَ: كَيْفَ تَكُونِينَ صَائِمَةً وَقَدْ سَبَبْتِ جَارِيَتِكَ؟ إِنَّ الصَّوْمَ لَيْسَ مِنَ الطَّعَامِ وَالشَّرَابِ.

Abandon quarrelling and troubling your servant. Let the dignity of those who fast be on you. Once the Prophet heard a woman who was fasting reviling her maid. The Prophet brought her some food and asked her to eat it. She said that she was fasting. The Prophet said: “How could you be fasting when you have reviled your maid? Fasting is not just abstaining from food and drink.”⁴⁴

The next rank of fasting implies whole-hearted fasting. In this state, we abandon all worldly thoughts that distract us from God. This form of fasting is broken when we start to think about worldly affairs. It is said that it is breaking this form of fast even if you think about what to prepare to break the fast with, since you do not have a strong belief that God will give you the promised daily bread. This rank is specifically for the Prophets and the honest ones who are close to God. God told the Prophet :

قُلِ اللّٰهُ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ

..Say: "God (sent it down)": Then leave them to plunge in vain discourse and trifling. [The Holy Qur'an, al-An'am 6:91]

Imam Sadiq narrated that God's Prophet had said:

الصَّوْمُ جُنَّةٌ: أَي سِتْرٌ مِنْ آفَاتِ الدُّنْيَا وَحِجَابٌ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْآخِرَةِ.

*"Fasting is a shield: that is, it is a covering against the calamities of this world and a protective barrier against the punishment of the Hereafter."*⁴⁵

1. From the Fire of Hell.

2. King James version.

3. King James version.

4. There are also many other places in the Bible where fasting is discussed. Consider the following two cases for example. Daniel fasted for three weeks before receiving his vision: "In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz:

His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands.

And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then he said unto me: Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words." (The Bible, Daniel 10:2-12)

Elijah fasted forty days before speaking with God: "Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the Prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay

down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (The Bible, Kings 19: 1-9).

5. The tenth day of the month of Muharram.
6. The ninth month of the Islamic year observed as sacred with fasting practiced daily from dawn to sunset.
7. Majma' al-Bayan, v.2, p.274.
8. This implies that both acts are wrong.
9. Mir'at al-'Uqul, v. 16, p.201.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid, p. 197.
12. Mir'at al-'Uqul, v. 16, p. 198.
13. Ibid. p.203.
14. Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 123.
15. Bihar al-Anwar, v.96, p.371.
16. Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 123.
17. Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 124.
18. Nahjul Balaghah, Subhi Salih, Hikmah no. 136.
19. Ibid., Sermon no. 110.
20. Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 120, Fayz al-Islam.
21. Ibid., Wise saying no.252, Sobhi Salih.
22. Ibid., Wise saying no.428.
23. Ibid., Advice no.47.
24. Ibid., Wise saying, no. 137, Fayz al-Islam.
25. Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon no.192, Subhi Salih.
26. Sarmayeh-e- Sokhan, v. 1, p. 14.
27. Jawahir al-Kalam, v. 16, p. 182.
28. Kimiya'ye Sa'adat, v. 1, p.208.
29. Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 125.
30. Safinah al-Bihar, v.2, p.78.
31. Ibid. p.79.
32. Ibid. p.78.
33. Ibid. pp.79-80.
34. Ibid. pp. 79-80.
35. Awallin Daneshgah wa Akharin Payambar, v.3, pp.37-38.
36. Located on both sides on the upper kidney poles.
37. Cortisone, Aldosterone.
38. The pancreas is a very important gland in the body. It digests your food and produces insulin, the main chemical for balancing the sugar level in the blood. The pancreas is a solid gland about 10 inches (25 cm) long. It is attached to the back of the abdominal cavity behind the stomach and is shaped like a tadpole.
39. Aldosterone secretion decreases with age, which can contribute to light-headedness and drop in blood pressure with sudden position changes (orthostatic hypotension). Cortisol secretion decreases but the level stays about the same.
40. Awallin Daneshgah wa Akharin Payambar, v.3, pp.40-41.
41. Ibid. v.3, pp.31-35.
42. Ahamiyate Ruzeh az Nazar-i- Ilm-i-Ruz, p.224.
43. Fasting as a New Method to Treat Illnesses, translated into Farsi by Imami, p. 12.
44. Al-Mahajjah al-Bayda, v.2, p. 131.
45. Ibid.

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