

Fast of the Month of Ramadhan

The lunar calendar of Islam brings the fast of the month of Ramadhan eleven days earlier every year. Thus, in a cycle of about thirty-three years, it passes through all the seasons successively. Fast was first prescribed on the second of Sha'ban in the second year of Hijrah (the migration of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny, from Mecca to Medina, corresponding to 622 A.D.).

On p. 59, of al-Saduq's *Amali* (or *Majalis*), the *faqih* mentor and author quotes Ja'far ibn Ali ibn al-Hassan ibn Ali ibn Abdullah ibn al-Mughirah al-Kufi as saying that his grandfather al-Hassan ibn Ali quotes his grandfather Abdullah ibn al-Mughirah quoting Isma'eel ibn Abu Ziyad quoting Abu Abdullah Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq (as) citing his forefathers, peace be upon all of them, saying that the Messenger of Allah (S)¹ once asked his companions, "Shall I tell you about something which, if you do it, will distance you from Satan as much as the distance between the east and the west?"

They said, "O yes! Please do so," whereupon he (S) said, "It is fast. It darkens his [Satan's] face, while charity breaks his back and the love for Allah's sake and assisting others in doing good deeds cut off his tail and seeking Allah's forgiveness splits his spine. For everything there is a *zakat* (purification), and the *zakat* of the bodies is fast."

Because the reader will come across the name of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as)² quite often in this book, we ought to stop here for a moment to introduce this great personality to those who may not be familiar with him. Needless to say, the Imam (as) is very well known to Muslims following the Shi'a Ja'fari Ithna-'Asheri School of Muslim Law; after all, they derive their *fiqh* from him and regard him as highly as, say, Hanafis regard Imam Abu Haneefah al-Nu'man, or as the Hanbalis regard Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal. But those who are not Shi'as are justified in wondering how Imam al-Sadiq (as) knew the forthcoming information; so, let us introduce them to one of the most knowledgeable men who ever lived on earth:

His full name is Abu Abdullah Ja'far ibn Imam Muhammad al-Baqir ibn Imam Ali al-Azgher Zaynul-'Abidin ibn Imam Husayn ibn Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib, of the clan of Banu Hashim, of the tribe of Quraysh, peace and blessings of Allah be upon all of them and many, many salutations. He was born in the sacred precincts of Medina on the 17th of Rabee' al-Awwal of 83 A.H., and he died at the age of 65 after

being poisoned by the Abbaside caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur and was buried at Baqee', Medina. His mother was a relative of the first caliph Abu Bakr: she was Umm Farwa Fatima daughter of Abdel-Rahman son of Abu Bakr. His father was Abu Ja'far Imam Muhammad ibn Ali al-Baqir (as) (57 – 114 A.H.), grandson of Imam Husayn (as).

If you wish to realize the greatness of Imam al-Sadiq (as), you will see his praise not only by Sunnis but also by non-Muslims as well, especially since his contributions to his contemporary intellectual revolution were invaluable and quite diverse. Not only was he a theologian, he was also a mathematician, a botanist, and alchemist, a scientist, and a man of letters.

To quote what Shi'as say about him may be out of place here. Probably the best compliment the Imam (as) received was from one of his world famous students: Imam Abu Haneefah al-Nu'man, founder of the major Sunni sect, the Hanafis, who was one of tens of thousands of scholars who prided himself in being Abu Abdullah's students. Abu Haneefah said verbatim: "Lawlal sanatan, la halaka al-Nu'man," which means, "Had it not been for those couple of years, al-Nu'man would have perished," a reference to two years which he spent in Baghdad as a student of Imam al-Sadiq (as) during al-Mansur's caliphate.

In his *Musnad Abu Haneefah*, Abul-Qasim al-Baghghar quotes al-Hasan ibn Ziyad as saying, "Abu Haneefah was asked once in my presence, 'Who is the most outstanding *faqih* you have ever seen?' and he answered by saying, 'Ja'far ibn Muhammad. When-al-Mansur brought him [from Medina to Baghdad], he sent for me and said, 'O Abu Haneefah! People are enchanted by Ja'far ibn Muhammad, so you should prepare some of your most difficult questions for him.' I prepared forty questions for him, then his [al-Sadiq's] father was brought from Heera. I visited him, greeted him, and sat at his place of meeting.

Then he turned to him and said, 'O Abu Abdullah! This is Abu Haneefah.' 'Yes, I know him,' he responded. Then he turned to me and said, 'Ask Abu Abdullah some of your questions,' so I kept asking him, and he answered all my questions, telling me our answers to them as well as those of the people of Medina..., till I finished asking him all the forty questions which I had prepared. He fully answered all of them." Then Abu Haneefah said, "Is not one who best knows people's different views the most knowledgeable among them?"

Where did Imam al-Sadiq (as) get his knowledge from? Let us answer this question not from the Shi'a but from the Sunni viewpoint in order to satisfy the curiosity of, and perhaps convince, some skeptical readers of this book. On p. 221, Vol. 2, of the original Arabic text of al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, the author makes a reference to one particular *saheefa*, a parchment type scroll, which was being written by Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) during the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, i.e., during more than two decades, reaching in the end a total length of seventy yards. As he was writing it, Imam Ali (as) used to tie its pieces, one at a time, to his sword's scabbard as a protective measure. This signifies how much he esteemed it.

It consisted of *ahadith* of the Holy Prophet (S), be they his own or those which he narrated about the Almighty and which he learned from archangel Gabriel (as), i.e. *Qudsi ahadith*. Al-Bukhari on the said page quotes al-A'mash quoting Ibrahim al-Tameemi quoting his father quoting Imam Ali (as) as saying that all they (Ali and his family) had were "The Book of Allah and this *saheefa* from the Prophet (S)."

On p. 36, Vol. 1, of al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, the author quotes al-Sha'bi] quoting Abu Juhayfa asking Ali (as), "Do you have any book?" Ali (as) said, "The Book of Allah, (what we have learned from) some knowledge bestowed upon a Muslim, and this *saheefa*." "What is written in this *saheefa*?" asked Abu Juhayfa. Ali (as) said, "It contains reason, [injunctions such as] the freeing of captives, and that no Muslim should kill another Muslim."

On p. 143 of *Basair al-Darajat*, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) is quoted as saying, "We have the *saheefa*; it is dictated by the Messenger of Allah (S) and hand-written by Ali (as); nothing permissible or prohibitive except that it is recorded in it, and nothing people need, nor any issue, except that it contains it, even the penalty for slightly scratching one's cheek." Other references to this *saheefa* exist on pages 67 and 69, Vol. 4, and on p. 144, Vol. 8, of al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, as well as on p. 115, Vol. 4, of Muslim's *Sahih*. Another name for this *saheefa* is *al-jami'a*, the book which includes or contains all knowledge.

In Arabic, a university is call *jami'a*, a place where knowledge and those who learn it gather, a gathering place of knowledge and scholarship. If you are fortunate enough to be in possession of a copy of *Usool al-Kafi* by Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni published in 1990 by Dar al-Ta'aruf of Beirut, Lebanon, read pp. 294–298 of its first volume to learn numerous details about not only this *saheefa* but also about Fatima's Mushaf, the copy of the Holy Qur'an kept by Fatima (as) daughter of the Messenger of Allah (S) many years before Othman ibn 'Affan asked Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) to help compile the text of the Holy Qur'an.

There are other references to this "university of knowledge," but we think this much suffices to let the reader know that the section of this book dealing with the rewards one receives from reciting a particular chapter of the Holy Qur'an is derived from one of the most ancient, if not the very most ancient, books written in the history of Islam.

Fast of the month of Ramadhan is the fourth pillar of Islam. The Arabic word *shahr* is used for a month due to its being *mushtahir*, well-known or famous, that is, the knowledge thereof reaches all people, as we are told by Imam Ibn Manzour, author of *Lisan al-Arab* on p. 432, Vol. 4. Such knowledge can be attained by sighting its crescent.

As to the reason why it has been called the month of Ramadhan, it is due to the fact that the Arabs gave the names of the months according to the times during which they occurred, and to the fact that it so happened that the month of Ramadhan coincided with the parching days of the summer. Its root word *ramd*, as the same author tells us on pp. 160–161, Vol. 7, of the same lexicon, means to burn due to excessive sun-heat reflected on the desert sands. The *ramda* is the burning rock. This is why it was

called the month of Ramadhan.

One may say in Arabic that a man's feet were burnt due to the heat, so he became *ramad*. It is also said that it was called the month of Ramadhan because people become *ramad* due to their suffering from the combination of hunger and thirst during a very hot month. Arab linguists say that to make something *armad* is to squeeze it between two soft rocks then to pound it. A person fasting, by analogy, pounds his own nature between two rocks: hunger and thirst.

According to one of his numerous traditions, Prophet Muhammad (S) is quoted saying, "The month of Ramadhan was named so because it tends to *ramad* the sins, that is, burn them." The righteous at the dawn of Islam used to call it *al-midmar*, meaning that it emaciates the souls and bodies and helps them get rid of the excesses of evils and sins whereby the souls and bodies were laden. During the life-time of the Prophet (S), the blessed month of Ramadhan used to be called *al-marzooq*, the one full of sustenance, due to the abundance of the blessings of Allah whereby His servants are sustained during it.

In a letter he sent to Jarrah al-Madayini, Muhammad ibn Ya'qub cites Imam Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq (as) saying, "Fast is not only to abstain from eating and drinking." Then the Imam (as) quoted Mary (as) mother of Christ (as), as the Holy Qur'an tells us, saying that she had vowed a fast for the Most Merciful One. The Imam (as) continued to say, "When you fast, you should safeguard your tongues, lower your gaze, and you should neither dispute with nor envy one another." This is recorded on p. 351, Vol. 94, of *Bihar al-Anwar*.

The Imam (as) is also quoted in the same and following page of the said reference saying, "When you fast, let your hearing and vision abstain with you from anything unlawful, against everything ugly, and leave hypocrisy aside, and do not harm those who serve you. Rather, adorn yourself with the dignity of the fast, and do not make your fasting day any different from the day when you do not fast."

1. This acronym stands for "peace be upon him and his family."

2. Acronyms for *Alahis-Salam*, peace be upon him.

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