

Some aspects of Fasting – 2

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 16 April 2021

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

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.” —The Quran, ch. 2, v. 183

This is the first verse in the section of verses of the Holy Quran which ordain fasting in the month of Ramadan. There is something which people call the *niyyah* or “intention” of fasting. *Niyyah* means *intention, aim or purpose* in the doing of a thing. But it is wrongly supposed that the *niyyah* of fasting consists of repeating certain words in which you state that you intend to keep the fast. On Ramadan timetables and other information about fasting, these words of *niyyah*, or intention to fast, are often quoted and these are supposed to be uttered when starting the fast. This expression of the intention by a set formula of words is unknown to the Holy Quran and the Hadith. Only in the case of voluntary fasting outside Ramadan, instances are reported in Hadith of making up the mind in daytime to fast, when nothing had been eaten up to that time, which is understandable. But there is no question of expressing such intention in the month of Ramadan, when people know when they start the fast that they are fasting.

In Sahih Bukhari, there is a chapter in the book on Fasting which is headed:

“He who fasts during Ramadan having faith (in Allah) and seeking His pleasure and **having an intention (*niyyah*)**.”

The words of the Holy Prophet are then given, saying: “People will be raised up (on the Day of Judgment) according to their intentions (*niyyah*).” (Bukhari, heading above hadith 1901). Similar words also occur in Hadith in regard to other acts of worship. The meaning is that those who carry them out, for example, prayer or fasting, merely as a ritual, cannot benefit from them. Only those can benefit who understand their aim and purpose and try to achieve it. For them, the fasts can bring such spiritual

progress that it protects them from committing sin. The aim or purpose of fasting is, according to the Quran, to make the fast: (1) a spiritual discipline, meaning to attain nearness to God and to have Him uppermost and closest in one's mind when performing any actions, (2) to make it a moral discipline, meaning to refrain from all evil, selfishness and greed, and (3) a means of feeling the deprivation that other people have to endure and to use your resources to alleviate their distress. So our *niyyah* of fasting is to ponder over what we wish to achieve through fasting.

There is a well-known hadith in Bukhari as follows:

“Fasting is an armour (or shield) with which one protects oneself; so let not him (who fasts) utter immodest (or foul) speech, nor let him act in an ignorant manner; and if a man quarrels with him or abuses him, he should say twice, I am fasting. And by Him in Whose hand is my soul, the odour of the mouth of one fasting is sweeter in the estimation of Allah than the odour of musk — he gives up his food and his drink and his (sexual) desire for My sake; fasting is for Me and I will grant its reward; and a virtue brings reward ten times like it.” (hadith 1894, see also hadith 1904)

It is not refraining from food that makes the breath of the faster so sweet; it is refraining from foul speech and abuse and evil words and deeds of all kinds, so much so that he does not utter an offensive word even by way of retaliation. What reaches God is the **sweetness of behaviour** of the fasting person. Thus, a fasting person undergoes not only a physical discipline by curbing his bodily desires, the craving for food and drink, and the sex appetite, but he is actually required to undergo a direct moral discipline by avoiding all kinds of evil words and evil deeds. Note also here God saying that the person fasting is doing it “for Me”. This means fasting to attain nearness to God, fasting purely for the purposes for which God has ordained fasting. If during fasting circumstances arise which could lead the fasting person away from the high objective he is seeking to attain, he should control his emotions and refrain from following them. In the sight of God, **the fast loses its value not only by taking food or drink but also by telling a lie**, using foul language, acting unfaithfully, or doing an evil deed.

Another well-known hadith in Bukhari runs as follows:

“When the month of Ramadan starts, the doors of heaven are opened and the doors of hell are closed, and the Satans are shackled in chains.” (hadith 1899)

The opening of the doors of Paradise and the closing of the doors of hell are for those who benefit from the fasts of Ramadan, building in themselves the true spirit of Ramadan in their lives. The devils are **chained** for the one who keeps the fast because he **curbs** and **chains** his lower passions — the desires which the devil arouses to make a person fall into evil. The doors of Hell are **closed** on him because he **closes** the door on doing all evil which leads to hell. The doors of Heaven are **opened** for him because, by rising above physical desires and by devoting himself to the service of humanity, he **opens the door** to lead a new kind of life in this world. So it is by fasting in its true spirit that the fasting person himself or herself, by their own action, chains the devils, closes the doors of hell and opens the doors of heaven.

All the commandments of the Quran are meant for those who are full-grown and capable of understanding what they are doing and why. This also applies to the injunction relating to fasts. Minors should not fast, but the Caliph Umar is quoted as saying: “Even our children are fasting” (Bukhari, heading above h. 1960). The object may have been to habituate children to fasting. Otherwise, only such people are under obligation to fast who are physically fit and capable of understanding the purpose of fasting. There is no harm if children are asked to keep a few fasts in order to get them accustomed to it, provided there is no great hardship involved. However, the teachings of Islam do not require non-adults to fast.

As to what breaks the fast, the three things which a person should abstain from in fasting are eating, drinking and having sexual intercourse. If any of these three acts is done out of free will and intentionally during the fast, this would break the fast. But if done by mistake, which may be by forgetfulness or under the wrong impression that the fast has ended, the fast remains and must be completed. It is stated in a hadith:

“If he (the fasting person) forgets and eats or drinks, he should complete his fast, for Allah fed him and made him drink.” (Bukhari, hadith 1933)

It is stated in traditional Islamic literature that if a fast is broken on a cloudy day, under the impression that the sun has set, and the sun then appears, then also the fast should be completed till sunset. It is not invalidated. In our modern times, this should not happen as we know what the present time is and we know from published timetables when the fast ends. However, mistakes are still possible and therefore this principle applies to such circumstances.

In Bukhari, it is related what various early Muslims, including some Companions, did during fasting which does not break the fast or what they said about it:

Ibn Umar moistened his cloth and placed it over him while he was fasting.

Ash-Sha'biyy entered a bath while he was fasting. Ibn Abbas said: There is no harm if one tastes the food in the cooking-pot or anything else. Al-Hasan said: There is no harm for the fasting person to rinse his mouth and getting cooled.

Ibn Masud said: When one of you is fasting, he can get up in the morning, apply oil to his head and comb his hair. Anas said: I have a pond, I dive into it while I am fasting. It has been reported about the Prophet that he brushed his teeth (with *miswak*) while he was fasting. Ibn Umar said: One can brush teeth early in the day and at the end of the day, and should not swallow the spittle.

Ata said: If he swallows his spittle I cannot say that his fast is nullified. Ibn Sirin said: There is no harm in brushing teeth with fresh *miswak*. Somebody said to him that it has a taste. He said: Water has a taste and you rinse with it. And Anas, al-Hasan and Ibrahim did not see any harm in applying collyrium (to the eyes). (Bukhari, book of Fasting, ch. 25)

Ata said: If he takes water into his nose and it goes into the throat unintentionally, there is no harm. Al-Hasan said: If a fly goes into the throat, there is nothing for him to do about it. (ch. 26)

Al-Hasan said: There is no harm if the person fasting puts water into the nostrils provided it does not reach his throat and he can apply collyrium (to the eye lids). Ata said: If after rinsing the mouth, he spits out all the water from it,

there is no harm provided he does not swallow spittle and what remains in his mouth. (ch. 28)

Abu Hurairah reported that vomiting does not break the fast because he expels something, not takes in anything. (ch. 32)

The Holy Quran does not mention the application of any punishment for deliberately breaking the fast. Hadith only shows that it is sufficient that the violator should be sincerely repentant.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رُؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ-
