

Ramadan Daily Quran Studies, compiled by Dr Zahid Aziz, 2026

Derived largely from the writings of Maulana Muhammad Ali

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# **Study 16: Fasting in Islam — Its purposes**

- The Holy Quran says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ

كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

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

- The first purpose of fasting is to enable us to develop and strengthen our powers of self-control. The result should be that we become more able to resist wrongful desires and bad habits, and therefore “guard against evil”.

- In fasting, by refraining from the natural human urges to satisfy one's appetite, we are exercising our ability of self-restraint. The more you exercise any ability or skill, the more developed it becomes. Then the power of self-restraint developed through fasting **must be applied in normal daily life** to bring about self-improvement.
- Seeking food, drink and sex are the basic, most deeply-ingrained instincts of an animal, including human beings. Therefore, in fasting we are tested with having to show self-control in face of **the strongest possible inner urges.**

- Fasting is a reminder that real and true human life is something higher than satisfying physical desires. That true life is attained by connecting the human soul with God and by having sympathy for those who are in need and by practically helping them.
- Fasting creates a feeling of nearness to God. We make a promise with God to refrain from certain actions till a certain time. No one can find out if we broke that promise, but it is only God Who can see us all the time. That feeling is intensified in our hearts.

- People these days are very concerned about the gathering of their personal information by human agencies, such as governments or technology companies. But how many are concerned about surveillance by God Who says in the Quran:

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكذِّبُونَ بِالذِّينِ ﴿٩﴾ وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ حَافِظِينَ ﴿١٠﴾  
كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ ﴿١١﴾ يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

“No, but you call the Judgment a lie, and surely there are keepers over you,  
honourable **recorders, they know what you do.**”

— 82:9–12

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ ۗ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ ﴿١٦﴾ ...

مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ ﴿١٨﴾

“And certainly We created man, and We know what his mind suggests to him —  
and We are nearer to him than his life-vein. ...

He does not utter (even) a word but there is by him  
**a watcher at hand.**” —50:16, 18

أَمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ ۗ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلْنَا لَدَيْهِمْ يَكْتُبُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

“Or do they think that We do not hear their secrets and their private discussions?  
Yes indeed, and Our messengers with them write down.” — ch. 43, v. 80

- So Allah has vastly more information on us, which is fully complete and accurate, than any power or agency in the world can obtain. Who then is more to be feared?
- Allah says in connection with fasting in Ramadan:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ  
 فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

“And when My servants ask you (O Prophet) concerning Me (God), surely I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should hear My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.”

—2:186

- God is near in any case, whether we feel it or not. A person can realize this nearness through prayer, in particular prayers during the month of fasting when the idea of closeness of God is in the mind of the person fasting.
- God says here that He takes the initiative in answering prayers, and that humans, in response, should answer the call of God, i.e., believe in and act on His teachings. God is holding out His hand for us to grasp. Therefore, closeness to God should not just be a vague feeling in a person's heart and mind. It must be manifested in action by walking in the right way out of belief in God.

- It is important to remember that fasting in Islam does not just consist of refraining from eating and drinking, but in fact from every kind of selfish desire and wrong-doing. The fast is not merely of the body, but essentially that of the spirit. The physical fast is a symbol and outward expression of the real, inner fast.
- A person who is fasting is really saying: “I am refraining from all wrong actions that I *desire* to do, by refraining from my deepest physical desires”.

- In this connection, the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has said:
  - “He who does not give up uttering falsehood and acting according to it, God has no need of his giving up his food and drink.” (Bukhari, hadith 1903)
- We end now with a statement of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad about fasting:
  - “People are unaware of the true nature of fasting. The fact is that no country or realm can be described if one has not been there. Fasting is not just the state of remaining hungry and thirsty. It has a real nature and effect which can only be discovered by experience.

- The human makeup is such that the less food is consumed the greater is the purification of the soul and the development of the powers of inner vision. God's purpose is that you should reduce one kind of food (physical) and increase the other kind (spiritual).
- The person fasting must always remember that the aim is not simply to remain hungry; he should be engrossed in the remembrance of God so as to attain severance from worldly desires. The object of fasting is that a person should abstain from the food which nourishes the body and obtain the other food which satisfies and brings solace to the soul.

- Those who truly fast for the sake of attaining to God, and not merely as a custom, should be absorbed in the praise and glorification of God, and in meditating upon His Unity, so that they attain the other kind of nourishment.”

(This statement is quoted from *Malfuzat*, vol. 9, p. 123)

*END OF STUDY 16*