

Teachings of Islam on fasting

Importance of self-reform and abstention from base desires

1. “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 Holy Quran, 2:183.

2. Allah says: “And when My servants ask you (O Prophet) about Me, surely I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant 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.

3. “And swallow not up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the authorities so that you may swallow up other people’s property wrongfully while you know.” — 2:188.

4. “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.” — The Holy Prophet Muhammad.

5. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and explained it by saying: “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:2-4). Moses also fasted forty days and forty nights (Exodus 34:28).

Purpose of fasting in Islam

1. To develop and strengthen our powers of self-control, so that we can resist wrongful desires and bad habits, and therefore “guard against evil” (see extract 1 above). In fasting, by refraining from the natural human urges to satisfy one’s appetite, we are exercising our ability of self-restraint, so that we can then apply it in our everyday life to bring about self-improvement.

2. To attain nearness and closeness to God so that He becomes a reality in our lives. As we bear the rigours of fasting purely for the sake of following a Divine commandment, knowing and feeling that

He can see all our actions, however secret, it intensifies the consciousness of God in our hearts, resulting in a higher spiritual experience (see extract 2 above).

3. To learn to refrain from usurping other’s rights and belongings. In fasting we voluntarily give up even what is rightfully ours; how can then we think of unlawfully taking what is not ours but belongs to someone else? (See extract 3 above.)

4. Charity and generosity is especially urged during Ramadan. We learn to give, and not to take. The deprivation of fasting makes us sympathise with the suffering of others, and want to try to alleviate it; and it makes us remember the blessings of life which we normally take for granted.

Fasting in Islam does not just consist of refraining from eating and drinking, but from every kind of selfish desire and wrong-doing. The fast is not merely of the body, but essentially that of the spirit as well (see extract 4 above). The physical fast is a symbol and outward expression of the real, inner fast.

Fasting is a spiritual practice to be found in all religions (see extracts 1 and 5 above). The great Founders of various faiths, such as Buddha, Moses and Jesus, practised quite rigorous fasting as a preliminary to attaining their first experience of spiritual enlightenment and communion with God. This kind of communion is indicated in extract 2 above.

Maulana Muhammad Ali on fasting

“The real purpose of fasting is to attain righteousness. A person who undergoes hunger and thirst, but does not behave righteously, has done nothing. If someone is told the aim and object of doing a certain duty, and he does that duty but without attaining the required aim and object, it is as if he has not done that duty.”

Special spiritual exertions in the month of Ramadan

Every year in the month of Ramadan, Maulana Muhammad Ali in his *khutbas* and writings used to exhort the *Jama'at* to undertake a spiritual exertion (*mujahida*) in two forms. One was to fall in prayer before God and beseech Him tearfully in *tahajjud* prayers to enable us to carry out the work of the propagation of Islam and the Quran, and the other was to make financial sacrifices. In this connection he wrote many heart-felt, moving prayers and entreated every member of the *Jama'at* that at least in the month of Ramadan they should treat the *tahajjud* prayer as obligatory for them. Once he suggested three types of supplications which were as follows:

1. Prayer for spiritual fostering by Allah:

‘All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds.’

— O God, Your providence comprehends every iota of the universe. You have provided the very best means for the physical development of human beings. Now provide for Your creation, who have moved far off from You and are lost in darkness racing towards destruction, spiritual nourishment through the Quran. Acquaint their hearts

with the bliss that is attained by bowing at Your threshold.

O God, Who granted the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his Companions unique success enabling them to transform the destinies of the entire countries and nations, foster and nourish us and our *Jama'at* today to make it reach the pinnacle of success in spreading the Quran and propagating Islam in the world. Let the foundations for the propagation of Your religion be laid by our hands, upon which an edifice continues to be raised till the Day of Judgment.

2. Prayer for triumph over unbelief:

‘Forgive us, grant us protection, have mercy on us. You are our Patron, grant us victory over the disbelieving people!’

— O God, unbelief is dominant over the world. Love of worldly things and wealth have taken hold of human hearts. Human beings are being led astray by possession of physical power, material resources and outward adornments. But, O God, it is Your promise that You shall make Islam triumph in the world. It is Your promise that after falling into the greatest deviation and wrongdoing

people will again turn to You. Fulfil this promise of Yours today and let the truth overcome falsehood and let Islam triumph over unbelief.

O God, the armies of unbelief and misguidance are attacking with full force. Your strength in the past too has been manifested through weak human beings. Let it be manifest today through this small *Jama'at*. We are weak, humble and sinners but we have a strong zeal to see Islam prevail over unbelief. Forgive us our faults, grant us protection, save us from stumbling, and be our helper and make this weak *Jama'at* of Islam overcome the vast strength of unbelief. O God, make the Quran and Muhammad *Rasulullah* and Islam triumphant in the world, and wipe off the forces of unbelief and misguidance.

3. Prayer for help from Allah:

‘Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.’

— O God, we do as much as it is in our power to obey You and to spread Your name and Your Word in the world, but we are weak and cannot fully discharge our duty of obeying You. Help us and produce within us the greatest strength to obey You.

O God, spreading Your name in the world is the exalted mission for which You had been appointing Your chosen ones, and it was only with Your help that they succeeded in achieving this magnificent goal. One such chosen man of Yours has entrusted us with this task, but we are small in numbers, weak, and lacking in means. We are opposed not only by outsiders but also by our own who hamper our way. Guide us through Your graciousness and infuse in us the same strength with which You have ever filled Your chosen ones, and create in our hearts the same light with which You have been illuminating the hearts of Your chosen ones.

O God, spreading Your message in the world is the most difficult of tasks in the world. Whenever such a reformation came about, it was not because of the strength of any man or army but it was from Your aid and succour. So we seek from You that help and aid which You have been bestowing upon Your chosen ones.

(*A Mighty Striving*, pages 314 – 315)