

Fast 2: Significance of Fasting in Islam

- *Patience*: This is a quality which is developed and strengthened through fasting. We **must wait** till a time to satisfy our basic physical needs and desires. Patience means to persevere in a difficult condition voluntarily, even though you could adopt unlawful and immoral means of getting out of it, but you restrict yourself to lawful means only. The Quran, according to some, refers to fasting as “patience” in the following passage:

“And seek assistance through patience and prayer, and this is hard except for the humble ones, who know that they will meet their Lord and that to Him they will return.”
(2:45–46)

وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا
تَكْبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ الَّذِينَ
يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلْقَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ
﴿٤٦﴾

- *Thankfulness*: It is only **deprivation** that can make us realize and value the blessings which we usually take for granted. Thankfulness for what we have got, for what someone has given us, is a quality which is not only commended and stressed by Islam, and other religions, but all human beings recognize its importance.
- *Charity and generosity*: The thankfulness mentioned above should not be merely in our feelings or in our words. It must be manifested practically. The deprivation of fasting should make us sympathise with the suffering of others, and desirous of alleviating it. It is recorded at the beginning of Sahih Bukhari:

“The Messenger of Allah was the most generous of all people, and he was most generous in Ramadan, when Gabriel met him, and he met him in every night of Ramadan and read with him the Quran; so the Messenger of Allah was more generous in the doing of good than the wind which is sent forth (on everybody).”

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَجْوَدَ
النَّاسِ، وَكَانَ أَجْوَدَ مَا يَكُونُ فِي رَمَضَانَ
حِينَ يَلْقَاهُ جَبْرِيْلُ، وَكَانَ يَلْقَاهُ فِي كُلِّ لَيْلَةٍ
مِنْ رَمَضَانَ فَيَدَارِسُهُ الْقُرْآنَ، فَلَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ
صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَجْوَدُ بِالْخَيْرِ مِنَ الرِّيحِ
الْمُرْسَلَةِ .

It is because being charitable is one of the objects of fasting that those who are unable to fast during Ramadan, and cannot make up for missed fasts after Ramadan, are required by the Quran to feed needy people in place of fasting:

“...And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor one.” (2:184)

... وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ
مِسْكِينٍ

- Another object of fasting stressed in the Quran is 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 taking what is not ours but belongs to someone else? The last verse in the section on fasting in the Quran says:

“And do not swallow up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of (other) people wrongfully while you know.” (2:188)

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَ
تُدْلُوا بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِتَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنْ
أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٨﴾

Swallowing up “your property” may mean the property placed in your charge, meant to be used for the benefit of others, such as government or community funds. The words “among yourselves” indicate people colluding with each other to usurp community or national property which is not rightfully theirs. It also prohibits people from bribing the authorities in order to take what actually belongs to others.

- In fasting we give up, for a while, the use of things which are ours and which we are fully entitled to use. This teaches us that sometimes in this life, *for a higher purpose*, it is better to give up something that we are entitled to, instead of insisting on having it.
- In this life often, in order to get what we are entitled to, we have to demand *extra* which usually involves a little use of falsehood. Fasting teaches trains us only to demand what is rightfully ours, even if it means having to accept a little less.