

Fast 17: Moderation in fasting (1)

- In the last Study we noted that the Holy Prophet Muhammad forbade his followers from extensive and severe voluntary fasting, which they were keen to do. He told them that they would not be able to do it, nor will they achieve anything by it. This is in accordance with the statement in the Quran in one of the verses about fasting:

“... So whoever of you is present in the month (of Ramadan), he shall fast in it, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. **Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you...**” (2:185)

فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ۖ وَمَنْ كَانَ
مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ
بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ

- We quote below some reports from Sahih Bukhari illustrating this “ease”. Some of these reports refer to voluntary fasting outside Ramadan.
- Firstly, a pre-fast meal should be taken and as late as possible, very close to the time of the *Fajr* prayer:

Sahl ibn Sa’d said: “I used to take the pre-fast meal (*suhūr* or *sahrī*) at home, and then I would hurry to reach the *Fajr* prayer with the Messenger of Allah.” (hadith 1920)

The Prophet said: “Do take food before the fast as there is blessing in the pre-fast meal (*suhūr*).” (hadith 1923)

- The fast should be ended at the earliest allowable time, as we see below:

The Messenger of Allah said: “People will continue to benefit as long as they hasten in breaking the fast.” (hadith 1957)

We were on a journey with the Messenger of Allah (and he was fasting). He asked a man: “Get down and mix ground-barley for me.” The man said: “O Messenger of Allah, the sun is still out!” He (the Holy Prophet) asked again: “Get down and mix ground-barley for me.” The man said: “O Messenger of Allah, the sun is still out!” He (the Holy Prophet) asked yet again: “Get down and mix ground-barley for me.” The man got down and mixed it for him. The Prophet drank it and then pointed his hand (towards the east) and said: “When you see the night advancing from this side, a person fasting should break the fast.” (hadith 1941)

- When travelling, the Holy Prophet and his Companions had the choice to fast or not:

1. “We used to be on a journey with the Prophet and a person who was fasting would not find fault with anyone who was not fasting, nor would a person who was not fasting find fault with anyone who was fasting.” (hadith 1947)
2. “The Messenger of Allah set out from Madinah towards Makkah and he fasted till he reached Usfan. Then he asked for water and raised the vessel in his hand to show it to people and broke the fast, and he did not resume fasting until he reached Makkah. This happened in Ramadan. The Messenger of Allah used to fast as well as break the fast (in a journey). So whoever wishes may fast and whoever wishes may break it.” (hadith 1948)

The Holy Prophet here publicly broke his fast in Ramadan due to being on a journey, so that his followers may, if they wish, do so also. Today’s religious leaders would break the fast secretly themselves and let their followers continue fasting!

- As regards voluntary fasting outside the month of Ramadan, many Companions of the Holy Prophet were keen to perform it, even all the time. But he restricted them. One of them reported:

The Messenger of Allah said to me: “O Abdullah, have I not been informed that you fast during the day and pray during the (whole) night?” I said: “Indeed I do, O Messenger of Allah!” He said: “Don’t do it like that. Fast, but also leave off fasting. Pray during the night, but also sleep. For, your body has a right over you, your eyes have a right over you, your wife has a right over you and your guest has a right over you. It is sufficient for you to fast three days a month, for each good deed brings you ten times the reward for the deed, so this would be like fasting all the time.” (hadith 1975)

This Companion goes on to say that he insisted to the Holy Prophet: “I have the strength to fast more.” So the Prophet told him “to fast like the prophet David”, and this was to fast *every other day*. When he still insisted that he could do more, the Holy Prophet told him: “There is no fasting better than that.”

The Companion said: “I insisted on hardship, so hardship was imposed on me.” In later years, when he grew old, he used to say: “I wish I had accepted the relief given by the Messenger of Allah” to fast only three days a month.

- Again, regarding extra voluntary fasting, the following is reported by Aishah:

The Prophet used to say: “Undertake only those deeds for which you have the strength, as Allah never gets tired but it is you who get tired.” And the prayer dearest to the Prophet was that which was performed with regularity, although it may be little. (hadith 1970)