

COMPILATION ON THE FAST

“the season of restraint”

FOR PREPARATORY AND DEEPENING PURPOSES

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ABOUT THE LAW OF FASTING

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight! (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, § 5*)

O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Ruz as a feast. Thus hath the Day-Star of Utterance shone forth above the horizon of the Book as decreed by Him Who is the Lord of the beginning and the end. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 24*)

Know thou that religion is as heaven; and fasting and obligatory prayer are its sun and its moon. We entreat God, exalted and glorified be He, to graciously aid everyone who acteth according to His will and good-pleasure. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God. (*Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 27*)

Moreover, in the traditions the terms "sun" and "moon" have been applied to prayer and fasting, even as it is said: "Fasting is illumination, prayer is light." One day, a well-known divine came to visit Us. While We were conversing with him, he referred to the above-quoted tradition. He said: "Inasmuch as fasting causeth the heat of the body to increase, it hath therefore been likened unto the light of the sun; and as the prayer of the night-season refresheth man, it hath been compared unto the radiance of the moon." Thereupon We realized that that poor man had not been favoured with a single drop of the ocean of true understanding, and had strayed far from the burning Bush of divine wisdom. We then politely observed to him saying: "The interpretation your honour hath given to this tradition is the one current amongst the people. Could it not be interpreted differently?" He asked Us: "What could it be?" We made reply: "Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and the most distinguished of God's chosen Ones, hath likened the Dispensation of the Qur'án unto heaven, by reason of its loftiness, its paramount influence, its majesty, and the fact that it comprehendeth all religions. And as the sun and moon constitute the brightest and most prominent luminaries in the heavens, similarly in the heaven of the religion of God two shining orbs have been ordained -- fasting and prayer. 'Islam

is heaven; fasting is its sun, prayer, its moon.'" (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 39*)

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING THE LAW OF FASTING

Cling firmly to obligatory prayer and fasting. Verily, the religion of God is like unto heaven; fasting is its sun, and obligatory prayer is its moon. In truth, they are the pillars of religion whereby the righteous are distinguished from those who transgress His commandments. We entreat God, exalted and glorified be He, that he may graciously enable all to observe that which He hath revealed in His Ancient Book. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

This is one of the nights of the Fast, and during it the Tongue of Grandeur and Glory proclaimed: There is no God beside Me, the Omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting. We, verily, have commanded all to observe the Fast in these days as a bounty on Our part, but the people remain unaware, except for those who have attained unto the purpose of God as revealed in His laws and have comprehended His wisdom that pervadeth all things visible and invisible. Say: By God! His Law is a fortress unto you, could ye but understand. Verily, He hath no purpose therein save to benefit the souls of His servants, but, alas, the generality of mankind remain heedless thereof. Cling ye to the cord of God's laws, and follow not those who have turned away from the Book, for verily they have opposed God, the Mighty, the Beloved. (*Baha'u'llah, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

The laws of God regarding fasting and obligatory prayer are absolutely incumbent upon His servants. Therefore, they must turn their faces to the Point of Adoration of the celestial Concourse, hold fast to the most sublime Station, and pray and supplicate that they may be freed from the doubts of misinterpretation. This is the way of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is the religion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is the path of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Whoever cherisheth the love of Baha, let him choose this straight path. Whoever abandoneth this path, verily, he is of them who are shut out as by a veil from Him. Shouldst thou observe any soul who is in doubt about this commandment or who misinterpreteth it, but hath no secret motive or defiance in what he doeth, be friendly towards him, and with the utmost cordiality and through kind speech, endeavor to turn him from the path of such interpretation towards the plain meaning of the verses of God. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

Keeping the Fast is enjoined upon all Bahá'ís, regardless of nationality; it has a very salutary effect both physically and spiritually, and the friends should realize Bahá'u'lláh never would have instituted it if it were detrimental to the health. *(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 21, 1946)*

Praise be unto Him Who hath revealed laws in accordance with His good-pleasure. Verily, He is sovereign over whatsoever He wisheth. O My friends! Act ye in accordance with what ye have been commanded in the Book. Fasting hath been decreed for you in the month of 'Ala. Fast ye for the sake of your Lord, the Mighty, the Most High. Restrain yourselves from sunrise to sunset. Thus doth the Beloved of mankind instruct you as bidden by God, the All-Powerful, the Unconstrained. It is not for anyone to exceed the limits laid down by God and His law, nor should anyone follow his own idle imaginings. Well is it with the one who fulfilleth My decrees for the love of My Beauty, and woe to the one who neglecteth the Dayspring of Command in the days of his Lord, the Almighty, the Omnipotent. *(Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)*

ATTITUDE AND SPIRIT WHEN FASTING

All praise be to the one true God Who hath assisted His loved ones to observe the Fast and hath aided them to fulfill that which hath been decreed in the Book. In truth, ceaseless praise and gratitude are due unto Him for having graciously confirmed His loved ones to perform that which is the cause of the exaltation of His Word. If a man possessed ten thousand lives and offered them all to establish the truth of God's laws and commandments, he would still be beholden unto Him, since whatsoever proceedeth from His irresistible decree serveth solely to benefit His friends and loved ones. *(Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)*

These are the days of the Fast. Blessed is the one who through the heat generated by the Fast increaseth his love, and who, with joy and radiance, ariseth to perform worthy deeds. Verily, He guideth whomsoever He willeth to the straight path. *(Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)*

Thou seest, O God of Mercy, Thou Whose power pervadeth all created things, these servants of Thine, Thy thralls, who, according to the good-pleasure of Thy Will, observe in the daytime the fast prescribed by Thee, who arise, at the earliest dawn of day, to make mention of Thy Name, and to celebrate Thy praise, in the hope of obtaining their share of the goodly things that are treasured up within the treasuries of Thy grace and bounty. I beseech Thee, O Thou that

holdest in Thine hands the reins of the entire creation, in Whose grasp is the whole kingdom of Thy names and of Thine attributes, not to deprive, in Thy Day, Thy servants from the showers pouring from the clouds of Thy mercy, nor to hinder them from taking their portion of the ocean of Thy good-pleasure. (*Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 299*)

Strengthen thou the foundation of the Faith of God, and worship the Almighty. Be constant in offering obligatory prayer, and be mindful of fasting. Day and night devote thyself to prayer, supplication and entreaty, especially at the prescribed times. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

In the realm of worship, fasting and obligatory prayer constitute the two mightiest pillars of God's holy Law. Neglecting them is in no wise permitted, and falling short in their performance is of a certainty not acceptable. In the Tablet of Visitation He saith: "I beseech God, by Thee and by them whose faces have been illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy countenance, and who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden." (2) He declareth that observance of the commands of God deriveth from love for the beauty of the Best-Beloved. The seeker, when immersed in the ocean of the love of God, will be moved by intense longing and will arise to carry out the laws of God. Thus, it is impossible that a heart which containeth the fragrance of God's love should yet fail to worship Him, except under conditions when such an action would agitate the enemies and stir up dissension and mischief. Otherwise, a lover of the Abha Beauty will assuredly and continually demonstrate perseverance in the worship of the Lord. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

DIFFICULTIES WITH FASTING

Even though outwardly the Fast is difficult and toilsome, yet inwardly it is bounty and tranquillity. Purification and training are conditioned and dependent only on such rigorous exercises as are in accord with the Book of God and sanctioned by Divine law, not those which the deluded have inflicted upon the people. Whatsoever God hath revealed is beloved of the soul. We beseech Him that He may graciously assist us to do that which is pleasing and acceptable unto Him. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult. With you, and indeed most Bahá'ís, who are now, as adults, accepting this glorious Faith, no doubt some of the ordinances, like fasting and daily prayer, are hard to understand and obey at first. But we must always think that these things are given to all men for a thousand years to come. For Bahá'í children who see these things practiced in the home, they will be as natural and necessary a thing as going to church on Sunday was to the more pious generation of Christians. Bahá'u'lláh would not have given us these things if they would not greatly benefit us, and, like children who are sensible enough to realize their father is wise and does what is good for them, we must accept to obey these ordinances even though at first we may not see any need for them. As we obey them we will gradually come to see in ourselves the benefits they confer. *(On Behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 342)*

DO OUR UTMOST

The laws of God, such as fasting, obligatory prayer and the like, as well as His counsels regarding virtues, good deeds and proper conduct, must be carried out everywhere to the extent possible, unless some insurmountable obstacle or some great danger presents itself or it runneth counter to the dictates of wisdom. For indolence and laxity hinder the outpourings of love from the clouds of divine mercy, and people will thus remain deprived. *(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)*

Thou hast written about the Fast. This is a most weighty matter and thou shouldst exert thine utmost in its observance. It is a fundamental of the Divine law, and one of the pillars of the religion of God. *(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting)*

PHYSICAL FASTING AS A SYMBOL OF THE SPIRITUAL FASTING

For this physical fasting is a symbol of the spiritual fasting, that is, abstaining from all carnal desires, becoming characterized with the attributes of the spiritual ones, attracted to the heavenly fragrances and enkindled with the fire of the love of God. *(Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 40)*

Well is it with you, as you have followed the Law of God and arisen to observe the Fast during these blessed days, for this physical fast is a symbol of the spiritual fast. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

FASTING AS PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL DETACHMENT

Material fasting is a token of our spiritual detachment. The Physical fast is simply restraint from eating physical food: physical detachment. The greater detachment is the spiritual fast: detachment from all desires of the self. This latter is our goal and the harder to attain. Still, we have the material fast to remind us and help us on our way towards real detachment. The Guardian assures us that prayer and fasting will help us in this struggle. He said they "act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus ensure its steady development". The fasting time, he said, is "essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation". He did not say it was a time of hunger, so the incidental hunger is of no consequence. It is not important. The significance and purpose of the fast is "fundamentally spiritual in character". (*On Behalf of Shoghi Effendi quoted in Fasting, A Bahai Handbook page 54*)

Fasting is of two kinds, material and spiritual. The material fasting is abstaining from food and drink, that is, from the appetites of the body. But spiritual, ideal fasting is this, that man abstain from selfish passions, from negligence and from satanic animal traits. Therefore material fasting is a token of the spiritual fasting. (*Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in Fasting, A Bahai Handbook page 54*)

COMMEMORATING THE STATE OF THE MANIFESTATIONS

The Divine wisdom in fasting is manifold. Among them is this: As during those days (i.e. the period of fasting which the followers afterward observe) the Manifestation of the Sun of Reality, through Divine inspiration, is engaged in the descent (revealing) of Verses, the instituting of Divine Law and the arrangement of teachings, through excessive occupation and intensive attraction, there remains no condition or time for eating and drinking. For example, when His Holiness Moses went to Mount Tur (Sinai) and there engaged in instituting the Law of God, He fasted forty days. For the purpose of awakening and admonishing the people of Israel, fasting was enjoined upon them. Likewise, His Holiness Christ, in the beginning of instituting the Spiritual Law, the systemizing of the

teachings and the arrangement of counsels, for forty days abstained from eating and drinking. In the beginning the disciples and Christians fasted. Later the assemblages of the chief Christians changed fasting into lenten observances. Likewise the koran having descended in the month of Ramadan, fasting during that month became a duty. In like manner His Holiness the Supreme (The Bab), in the beginning of the Manifestation through the excessive effect of descending verses, passed days in which His nourishment was reduced to tea only. Likewise, the Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh), when busy with instituting the Divine Teachings and during the days when the Verses (The Word of God) descended continuously, through the great effect of the Verses and the throbbing of the heart, took no food except the least amount. The purpose is this: In order to follow the Divine Manifestation and for the purpose of admonition and the commemoration of their state, it became incumbent upon the people to fast during those days. For every sincere soul who has a beloved longs to experience that state in which his beloved is. If his beloved is in a state of sorrow, he desires sorrow; if in a state of joy, he desires joy; if in a state of rest, he desires rest; if in a state of trouble, he desires trouble. Now, since in this Millennial Day, His Holiness the Supreme (The Bab) fasted many days, and the Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) took but little food or drink, it becomes necessary that the friends should follow that example... (*Table talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, by Mrs. Corinne True: Star of the West, Vol. IV, no. 18. p.305 and Lights of Guidance, p. 234*)

CLEANSING OF THE SOUL

Glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! These are the days whereon Thou hast bidden all men to observe the fast, that through it they may purify their souls and rid themselves of all attachment to any one but Thee, and that out of their hearts may ascend that which will be worthy of the court of Thy majesty and may well beseem the seat of the revelation of Thy oneness. Grant, O my Lord, that this fast may become a river of life-giving waters and may yield the virtue wherewith Thou hast endowed it. Cleanse Thou by its means the hearts of Thy servants whom the evils of the world have failed to hinder from turning towards Thine all-glorious Name, and who have remained unmoved by the noise and tumult of such as have repudiated Thy most resplendent signs which have accompanied the advent of Thy Manifestation Whom Thou hast invested with Thy sovereignty, Thy power, Thy majesty and glory. These are the servants who, as soon as Thy call reached them, hastened in the direction of Thy mercy and were not kept back from Thee by the changes and chances of this world or by any human limitations. (*Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 79*)

This Fast leadeth to the cleansing of the soul from all selfish desires, the acquisition of spiritual attributes, attraction to the breezes of the All-Merciful, and enkindlement with the fire of divine love. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God. They act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development. (*Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 27*)

Verily, I say, fasting is the supreme remedy and the most great healing for the disease of self and passion. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

PROTECTION

We beseech God to assist His people that they may observe the most great and exalted Fast, which is to protect one's eye from beholding whatever is forbidden and to withhold one's self from food, drink and whatever is not of Him. We pray God to confirm His loved ones that they may succeed in accomplishing that which they have been commanded in this Day. (*Bahá'u'lláh The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

Besides all this, prayer and fasting is the cause of awakening and mindfulness and conducive to protection and preservation from tests.... (*Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith p. 368*)

SPIRITUAL ELEVATION

One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

Fasting is the cause of the elevation of one's spiritual station. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

We, verily, have set forth all things in Our Book, as a token of grace unto those who have believed in God, the Almighty, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting. And We have ordained obligatory prayer and fasting so that all may by these means draw nigh unto God, the Most Powerful, the Well-Beloved. We have written down these two laws and expounded every irrevocable decree. We have forbidden men from following whatsoever might cause them to stray from the Truth, and have commanded them to observe that which will draw them nearer unto Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Loving. Say: Observe ye the commandments of God for love of His beauty, and be not of those who follow in the ways of the abject and foolish. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

They [obligatory prayer and fasting] act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development. (*Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 27*)

REMINDER

All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants, and enjoined on them the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and sufferings of the destitute. (*Bahá'u'lláh The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*)

SPIRITUAL MONTH

"The fasting period, which lasts nineteen days starting as a rule from the second of March every year and ending on the twentieth of the same month, involves complete abstention from food and drink from sunrise till sunset. It essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. Its significance and purpose are, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desired." (*From a letter written on*

behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, January 10, 1936 found in Lights of Guidance, p. 233)