

# GOD'S MERCY THROUGH FASTING

HUSAYN ANSARIAN

TRANSLATED BY MOHAMMAD JAVAD SHOMALI

**ABSTRACT:** Although all acts of worship that are done out of sincerity attract God's mercy, fasting holds a special place in attaining it. Fasting not only is practiced by Muslims, but the worshippers of previous religions also practised it. The doors of mercy are opened during the month of fasting, or the Month of Ramadan. During this month, Muslims all over the world refrain from food, drink, and other physical needs during the day; moreover, this period is also a time to achieve nearness to God by purifying the soul and taking advantage of His mercy through worship and good deeds. This article expounds on God's mercy during this blessed month by describing the wisdom and benefits of fasting, and the position achieved by those who fast.

## Special features of fasting

There are two elements that distinguish fasting from the other acts of worship:

1. Fasting is not specific to Islam: previous religions also included fasting as an act of worship, for example, the Torah relates that Moses fasted for forty days.

2. The Month of Ramadan, the month of fasting, has been said by our Imams to be a month in which the doors of mercy are open.

Every year, when the month of Ramadan approached, the Prophet would say, “Oh, Muslims, at the dawn of crescent of the Month of Ramadan, the soldiers of Satan will be bounded and the doors of the heaven and mercy will open.” During the last days of the month of Sha‘ban he would say, “Oh People, the month of God has come towards you with blessings, mercy, and forgiveness.”

God’s blessings are of two types:

- a) The blessing that creates in us the ability to grow and perfect ourselves as it installs in us the tendency towards purity and divine manners: “*Were it not for God’s grace and His mercy upon you, not one of you would ever be pure.*”<sup>1</sup>
- b) The mercy given to people in return for their good deeds and worship. Along with helping the poor, fasting is one of the best good deeds that qualify for this type of blessing.

One of the least advantages of fasting is its effects on our physical health; it gives our body a break to repair itself and balances its chemicals. Many illnesses can be cured by fasting. The Prophet said, ‘Fast and be healed’.

---

<sup>1</sup> Qur’an: 24: 21

Furthermore, through fasting a person is replying to God's call. God loves us and because of His love and mercy, He wants to help people in their spiritual and emotional challenges and so He calls out to people in different forms, as stated in the Qur'an. Among these calls are the call for forgiveness. In the verse 14:10, God calls all human beings to forgive their sins which means to do something to qualify ourselves for forgiveness.

How can we answer this call? One of the ways is to engage in acts of worship. During the Prophet's night ascension – the *Mi'raaj* – the Prophet asked God what the first act of worship was, to which God replied, "The first worship is silence and fasting." Then the Prophet asked about the result of fasting and God answered:

Fasting leads to wisdom, wisdom leads to awareness, and awareness to certitude; once a person reaches certitude, it no longer matters how days and nights are spent, with difficulty or ease.

This is perhaps why God singles out fasting as belonging to Him and that He will be the reward of it. In the same way that all lands belong to God although the Kaaba has superiority, all months are special though the Month of Ramadan is considered to be the month of God.

Fasting is superior to other acts of worship in two ways:

- 1) Due to its nature, fasting can only be done out of sincerity. Unlike other acts of worship that can be observed by people, the span of fasting is so long that at least for parts of it, one will be on his own.

If a person only intends to show off, he can avoid eating in front of others and eat in private so he would not fast the whole day. Therefore, a person who completes his fasting even in private proves that he has done so for the sake of God, because there is no observer other than God over what a person does in private. Imam Ali said, “God made fasting obligatory to test people’s purity of intention (*ikhlaas*).”

- 2) Fasting also disarms Satan, our worst enemy, and makes it easier for us to approach God. Satan usually finds his way into through our lust which is empowered by eating and going after our other worldly desires. Satan uses them to distract us from our higher goals so that our hearts gradually become his residence. However, fasting gives us a break from our desires, a chance to strengthen our will, and helps us focus on the more important aspects of life. A fasting person is in such good state that he or she can easily abandon temptations and enjoy the remembrance of God.

### **The wisdom behind fasting**

When Imam Sadiq was asked about the wisdom behind fasting, he replied:

God made fasting compulsory so that the poor and the rich would be the same. This is because the rich does not feel the pain of hunger to be able to understand and show mercy to the poor. Whenever he wants something, it is available to him. Therefore, God wanted His creation to be equal; for the rich to feel the pain of

hunger so that He is kind to the weak and shows mercy to the poor.

There is a difference between knowing something and feeling something. The rich know that there are hungry people, but now must fast to experience real hunger. Furthermore, this hunger reminds both the rich and poor of their hunger and thirst on the Day of Resurrection, a reminder which can have powerful effect on a person's soul. Furthermore, one feels his weakness before God and will become humble towards Him.

## **The benefits of fasting**

### **1. Accessing the mysteries**

Imam Ali said, "God has placed five effects in five things: Respect in obedience, abjection in disobedience, wisdom and knowledge in hunger, solemnity in the night prayer, and richness in contentment."

Hunger (or fasting) is said to be the place where wisdom is placed by the means of which a person can reach knowledge. In another hadith, Imam Ali says he is shocked by a person who tries to seek knowledge with a full stomach.

### **2. Banishing Satan**

Once the Prophet asked his companions, "Do you want me to tell you of an act that if you act upon it will distance Satan from you, the way the east is distant from the west?" When they all showed interest, he mentioned three acts: Loving for the sake of God, giving charity, and

fasting were tools to defeat Satan. As the Prophet said, “Fasting is a shield against the hellfire.”

### **3. Attracting God’s mercy and love**

According to the Prophet, God likes it when people lessen their speech, food intake, and sleep and dislikes over-eating, over-sleeping, and excessive talking. The Prophet also said there is nothing more detested by God than a full stomach. Normally, during the Month of Ramadan, we are more likely to succeed in repenting, purifying ourselves, helping others, and being patient, as these are acts that earn us God’s love. It does not come as a surprise then that God appoints a group of angels to take care of those who fast. Imam Sadiq said:

He who fasts in the warmth of the day for the sake of God and bears thirst and hunger, God appoints a thousand angels to touch him with love and give him glad tidings that when he breaks his fast God will tell him how he looks and smells. My angels! Be witnesses that I have forgiven him.

On another occasion, Imam Sadiq said, “There are two moments of joy for a fasting person: one is when [the day finishes and] he breaks his fast and the other when he meets his Lord.”

### **4. Abundant reward**

The reward one achieves because of fasting is so big that it cannot be compared to the difficulty he experiences when avoiding his desires for

short moment. The reward given for fasting is more than that of other acts of worship. According to a *Hadith Qudsi* (divine saying):

Every righteous act is rewarded ten times or a hundred times more except for fasting which is Mine and I will be its reward.

Fasting is also the best example of patience. Imam Sadiq interpreted the term patience in the verse 2:45 as fasting. When patience is interpreted as fasting, the reward appointed for it is given for fasting as well:

*Indeed the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning.* (39:10)

Although our entire existence is from God and it is only with his help that we can fast, still God is extremely loving and fasting is so special that for every breath a person takes in the month of fasting and for every moment of his sleep he will be rewarded. The Prophet said:

He who fasts a day voluntarily, even if he is given gold as much as this world, still he has not received his reward completely, and it will only be completed on the Day of Judgement.

### **The high position of those who fast**

The biggest source of happiness for believers is when God accepts and loves them. Fasting opens a door to the love of God and puts people under His attention. The Prophet said, "Indeed, God has appointed angels to pray for those who fast." In another narration, the Prophet

said that if angels are appointed to pray for a group of people, their prayer will be definitely accepted by God. The Prophet also said, "I swear by He in whose hands lies my life, the change in the smell of a fasting person's mouth is more likable to God than the smell of musk."

Of course, God will show more mercy to a person gives up on his desires for a while for His sake and submits his will to the will of God. Imam Ali said:

When a person fasts, his sleep will be counted as worship, his silence as *tasbih* (glorification of God), his prayers will be answered and his acts will be rewarded twice. Without a doubt, his prayers when he breaks his fast will be granted.

The Prophet said:

Indeed, there is a special entrance to heaven called *Rayyan* from which no one will enter except for the people who fast.

Therefore, fasting has many benefits, such as helping us tolerate our difficulties easier and making us better people who are worthy of God's love and mercy and this is why fasting has been considered as one of the best acts of worship that existed in all divine religions.