

Fasting and the Holy Month of Ramadhan

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Fasting - A Body/Mind/Spirit Healing

Allah the Almighty says in the Qur'an:

“And seek (Allah’s) assistance with Patience and Prayer; and truly it is extremely heavy and hard except for those with full submission. Who are certain that they are going to meet their Lord and that unto Him they are going to return.” 2:45-46

Numerous Prophetic traditions interpreted the ‘Patience’ in the Ayah as ‘fasting,’ which means fasting is the very first element of the spiritual journey to God. All the prophets in their spiritual journey have been seeking assistance with fasting.

1. Prophet Moses

“I had gone up the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant which He had made with you; and I remained on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights without eating bread or drinking water. Then the Lord gave me the two stone tablets..”¹

2. Prophet Jesus

In his spiritual journey was aided by fasting against the devil: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil, and after fasting 40 days and 40 nights he was hungry...”²

It also appears from chapter 5 of the Gospel of Luke that the disciples would frequently fast and pray.

3. Prophet of Islam

The entire Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet of Islam in the holiest night of the holiest month of Ramadhan; the month of fasting.

“The month of Ramadhan in which the Qur'an is revealed.” 2:185

“Indeed, We revealed it (the entire Qur'an) in the night of Measure.” 97:1

¹ Deut 9:9

² Matt 4:1-10

According to many Hadiths, the Torah was revealed to Moses on the 6th of Ramadhan, Injil was revealed to Jesus on the 12th of Ramadhan, Psalms of David revealed to him on the 18th of Ramadhan and the Holy Qur'an in the Night of Qadr (most probably 23rd of Ramadhan).³

In other words, all revelations occurred during the fasting month of Ramadhan. Could it be any reason more important than the spirituality of fasting?

Benefits of Fasting

1) Physical Healing

It is quoted from the Prophet of Islam to have said: "Fast, you'll be healthy". An Egyptian pyramid inscription in 3800B.C also reads: "Humans live on one-quarter of what they eat; on the three-quarters live their doctor!"

The three fathers of Western Medicine; (Hippocrates, Galen & Paracelsus) prescribed fasting as the greatest remedy and the physician within. Life Magazine in its September 1996 issue considered fasting: the healing revolution. There are more than 500 medical journal articles available on therapeutic fasting on the internet.

The outstanding physicians named fasting as being; the medicine for the 21st century. They believe the human body is designed to heal itself, if only given the opportunity. Dr. Otto Buchinger; Germany's great fasting therapist after more than 100,000 fasting cures says: "Fasting is, without doubt, the most effective biological method of treatment.. it is the operation without surgery... it is a cure involving exudation, redirection, loosening up and purified relaxation."

He furthers therapeutically; fasting cures many of our modern illnesses, including the following: allergies, cardiovascular disease, chronic diseases of the digestive system, degenerative and painfully inflammatory illnesses of the joints, myriad disturbances in one's eating behavior, glaucoma, initial malfunction of the kidneys, tension and migraine headaches, as well as skin diseases. Preventively, it's designed to cleanse, and to regenerate, rejuvenate and restore a person's sense of well-being, in body, mind and soul. As Doctor Buchinger would conclude: "When the body fasts, the soul is hungry; when the body becomes lighter, the soul also craves relief."

Dr. Joel Fuhrman in Fasting and Eating for Health notes: "Fasting has been repeatedly observed to alleviate neuroses, anxiety and depression."⁴

³ Al-Kafi; Vol.2, p.628, Vol.4, pp 157, 159, 193

⁴ Fasting and Eating for Health, by Dr. Joel Fuhrman, p. 19.

Fasting marvelously decomposes and burns all the cells and tissue that are aged, damaged, diseased, weakened or dead, a process called in medicine autolyze or self-digest or detoxification.

Michael Rosenbaum, M.D., Director of the California-based Orthomolecular Health Medicine Medical Society, notes on the significance of fasting as a detoxification program: "The hidden cause of many chronic pains, diseases and illnesses may be invisible toxins, chemicals, heavy metals and parasites that invade our bodies . . . Chances are slim that your doctor will tell you that toxins may be the root cause of your health problems. He or she may not even know about how these toxins are affecting your body . . . As your cells go, so goes your health. If your cells have been invaded by toxins and dangerous chemicals, your resistance to disease is diminished. Clean and nourish your cells, and you're on the road to better health."

When by fasting you stop the input of nutrition for a while, then a flurry of cleansing starts up, the rugs are lifted and the dirty dishes are brought out of the cabinet where they were stashed. Cleansing begins in earnest. U.S Congress approved \$20 million in 1998 for funding of the National Institutes of Health's fledging office of Alternative Medicine. This went up to \$50 million in 1999 and to \$68.7 million in 2000 which shows the growing interest of the Congress.

Healing Crises

Those fasting sometimes experience side effects during the first days. The side effects may vary from fatigue, malaise, headaches, vomiting to the symptoms of cold and flu. These reactions are sometimes called in medicine healing crises, which are temporary and caused due to elimination and cleansing of toxins. A fasting person should be patient and let this period pass.

I should however stress that there are circumstances, which exempt people from fasting as mentioned in detail in the books of Islamic Jurisprudence, e.g. a diabetic who not only needs to take regular medication but their diet is very strict throughout the day, hence should not fast, or else not only his/her fasting is void, it is even considered sinful. Similarly, a pregnant woman is exempt from fasting if it is going to either harm her or the baby. In general, the rule is that fasting is forbidden, if the person is confident that fasting will be physically harmful to them.

2) Social Healing

"Truly! Allah wrongs not mankind in aught; but mankind wrong themselves."10:44

A man wrote a letter to Imam Askari (a.s) asking him: "For what reason did Allah make fasting compulsory?"

The Imam (a.s) wrote in reply: "God has made fasting compulsory so that the rich shall find the pain of hunger so they have a mercy upon the poor."⁵

Starvation and its related diseases causes one person per second to die on this planet, 75% of them being infants and children under the age of 5.

Typically, stories involving deaths in Africa receive lesser coverage than those, which occur elsewhere. Nonetheless, let us read the following news.

Exodus newsmagazine in its July 22, 2001 issue reported: **Starvation In Ethiopia, Help Slowly Arriving, Death Toll Cannot Be Determined** By Howard A. Gutman

"A massive tragedy is unfolding in Ethiopia as thousands of starving people are expected to die. Without help, many expect the death toll to be in the millions. Yet little is being done in the U.S."

According to the same newsmagazine in the last famine, there were approximately one million deaths.

Now compare the above news with the following:

'More than half of U.S adults (20+) are overweight. Nearly one-quarter of U.S adults are obese.' And the figures are drastically increasing. This is despite all weight-loss programs in these countries.

According to Wolf & Colditz in 'Current estimates of the Economic Cost of Obesity in the US 1998': "Economic cost in the U.S related to the overweight in 1995 was the total of \$99.2 billion. And according to the same source Americans spend \$33 billion annually on weight-loss products and services. This includes low calorie foods, artificially sweetened products; such as sodas and memberships to commercial weight-loss centres.

And if you want to know whether you are among those over-weight people in a time when starvation causes one person per second to die, here is your scale.

The biggest problem facing the world today is not people dying in the streets of Mumbai, Zimbabwe or Ethiopia; it is rather the lack of a sense of caring for those disadvantaged people whose rights have been usurped by others. Fasting provides the opportunity for the faster to feel and find for himself or herself the pain and agony that a poor person is going through. A fasting person can also keep his or her money, usually spent on lunch, away to feed a group of poor people with. Thus, Zakatul-fitreh is compulsory and is regarded as the compilation of fasting.

⁵ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.96, p.339.

Nonetheless, some fasters sleep during the day as much as they can to avoid the so-called pains of fasting, and upon sunset enjoy a feast greedily and hence lose the entire medical, social and spiritual benefits of it.

Reduction of crimes during the month of Ramadhan is another social benefit of fasting.

3) Spiritual Healing

“O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you that you may gain self-restraint.” 2:183

Despite all the abovementioned benefits of fasting, we believe the main benefits of religious fasting are its spiritual rejuvenation and healing.

Fasting is prevention from certain things most of which are not only normally permissible but also even quite essential in our lives. By fasting we avoid food and drink which are the main nutritional sources for our body. This challenge against permissible and normally useful inputs is to give us the strength to avoid taking things that are harmful, including toxins, for our body and soul. In other words, I am able to fast against Halal food and soft drink over a month, should I not be able, by far, to fast against intoxicants and Haram foods over a year?

This is in spite of the fact that the first are my essential needs and the latter are not. A religious fasting is not just a physical diet program. When we fast from food we are expected to also fast from all harmful and forbidden actions and intentions. I may call this process a spiritual detoxification.

Fasting, if made with the intention of closeness to God, ascends one from the kingdom of animals to the realm of angels. You therefore, close your physical mouth to open your spiritual mouth. You fast your body to let your spirit feast with mysterious morsels. When you fast, you empty your stomach from the bread to fill it up with Unique Glorious Pearls.

Fasting is the Heart of Servitude

Fasting is prevention and prevention is separation and detachment and detachment is the heart and the reality of servitude to God.

Other benefits of Fasting

Fasting has many other benefits such as punctuality, patience, contentment and many others that unless one fasts cannot really realize them.

Degrees of Fasting

A Natural Diet

People at this level fast solely for medical purposes. This is certainly not a religious fasting.

Religious Fasting

Religious fasting may be observed in three different levels:

1. Fasting of Al-Shari'ah (Jurisprudential Fasting)

Fasting for many Muslims is mainly to refrain from what they must jurisprudentially refrain from such as eating, drinking, sexual intercourse etc. Although this is the lowest and the least level of religious fasting, once it is offered for the sake of God, the faster is religiously considered fasting. To give you an idea of how low the level of this stage is, let me share some examples with you. A Muslim girl may fast without practicing her Islamic dress code at school and her fasting is valid on this level. A Muslim may observe fasting and yet listens to rock and roll and his/her fasting is jurisprudentially valid.

No doubt, the purpose of fasting is not just to avoid food and drink and hence this is the very lowest level of fasting for the very beginners to start their journey towards perfection and promotion. Thus, it is quoted from the Prophet of Islam (S) that: "Many people gain nothing from their fasting save hunger and thirst."⁶

The Shari'ah fasting is prescribed for beginners as a form of training to help them become acquainted to waking up at dawn with the excuse of eating and drinking lest they feel hungry and thirsty during the day, in order for them to experience the pleasant breeze at dawn, to be awake at a time when the divine cups of spirituality are served.

The least he is expected, therefore, to gain by the end of Ramadhan is to have gotten used to offering his/her morning prayers on time.

A faster at this level is expected to think why he or she is told to refrain from eating and drinking which are essential nutrition for his or her body? Could it be that by refraining from consuming the essentials I learn to more easily refrain from unnecessary and even harmful inputs to my body and soul? Once he or she successfully finishes a month of Shari'ah fasting by refraining from soft drinks and Halal food and even finds him/herself healthier than before, the faster should find it easier by far

⁶ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.87: P.207.

to avoid intoxicants or Haram foods which are even harmful for his or her body and does not really require.

Once the faster is aware of such facts, they will be ready to enter the higher level of fasting, which I have called the fasting of Al-Tariqat.

2. Fasting of Al-Tariqat (Ethical Fasting)

This is the fasting of noble people. People in this degree not only fast from what is jurisprudentially mentioned, but they also observe an ethical fasting too. Such noble fasters let their eyes, ears and all other body parts fast against whatever which is regarded in religion as Haram. Gossiping is always Haram, but for them it is more Haram during the fasting period. Non-Islamic dress is always Haram but for them is an essence during Ramadhan. This is called the fasting of Tariqat. Imam As-Sadiq (a.s) is quoted from his ancestors from the Prophet of Islam (S):

“When you fast, let your ears, your eyes, your hair, your skin and all your body fast too. Do not let your fasting day be the same as non-fasting ones.”⁷

It is quoted from Prophet Jesus to have said: “Renew yourselves and fast, for I tell you truly, except you fast, you shall never be freed from the power of Satan, and from all disease that come from Satan.”⁸

A lady whilst fasting was swearing at her maid in the presence of the Prophet of Islam (S). The Prophet (S) offered her some food to eat. She said: “I’m fasting O Messenger of God!” the Prophet replied: “How are you fasting and you swear at your maid. Fasting is not only from food and drink. Indeed God made it that way so that food and drink are used as a veil against other sins, verbal or action. How few are fasting and how many are just hungry.”⁹

3. Fasting of Al-Haqiqat (Mystical Fasting)

This is the highest level of fasting, which belongs solely to the special nobles. Fasters- who are not many- at this degree believe you are what you think and hence they fast from all other than God including, Paradise. They make sure that during the month of Ramadhan they detach themselves from whatever which is other than God. This state of absolute detachment (Al-Enqeta’) is the reality of servitude to God. This is why I named this stage the fasting of Al-Haqiqat (Reality).

⁷ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.96 p.292.

⁸ From Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947.

⁹ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.96 p.293.

They believe as physical fasting burns the fat and removes the toxins, such mental fasting also does the same to the mind. The reward of fasting in this degree is none other than God Himself, the Almighty. This is the meaning of the Holy Hadith that Allah the Almighty says: "I will reward all rituals of mankind from ten times to seven hundred times save Patience, for it is for Me and I am its reward, and Patience is **fasting**."¹⁰

A faster at this stage, since he or she is fasting from other than God, deserves to be His guest in His month. This status is called in Islamic mysticism Assimilation in God, (*Al-Fana' Fil-Lah*) which is the ultimate purpose of servitude to God. To this end, Muslim mystics consider fasting even greater than prayers, in that, the devotee during his prayers needs to engage his organs, which in a sense means engagement within the self, whereas fasting is equal to refraining and detachment and requires no engagement. This is the stage where one can gain the Visit of God as described in the Ayah, in the beginning of this article, as the ultimate purpose of servitude to God.

¹⁰ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.96, p.252.

Ettiquettes of a Fasting Person

In the Name of God; the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

What a FASTER is recommended to do?

1. Recitation of the Qur'an: "Every thing has a season, and the season of the Qur'an is Ramadhan." Imam Al-Baqir (a.s)
2. Invocation: "Indeed there is a granted invocation for every faster at the time of his/her breakfast." The Prophet of Islam (S)
3. Endeavour in Worshipping
4. Hiding fasting unless the faster is asked.
5. Smelling of and wearing perfume (for ladies not in front of strangers): "Perfume is the gift of a faster." The Prophet of Islam (S)
6. Feeding the fasting people: "Whoever feeds one who is fasting will have the equivalent reward". The Prophet of Islam (S)
7. Breaking his/her fast after Maghrebain Prayers that he/she may gain the reward of those who pray whilst fasting. Unless a faster cannot tolerate it or there is someone who is waiting for him/her to break their fast together.

What a FASTER is recommended not to do?

1. Dispute, argue and swear.
2. Reading poems except for Ahlul-Bait (a.s)
3. Kissing, touching and foreplay with ones' spouse.
4. Brushing teeth with a wet toothbrush.
5. Using eye make-up (Kohl) or eye-drops.
6. Rinse out the mouth (Except for Wudhu').

7. Giving blood or anything, which makes the faster weak.
8. Inhaling where one does not know if it reaches the throat.
9. Smelling of flowers specially narcissus,
10. Enema with solid.
11. Making your clothes wet.
12. Sitting in the water (for women),
13. Having a full stomach (for those excused from fasting)
14. Traveling before the 23rd of Ramadhan,
15. Troubling your worker or family.

Self-restraint, the Purpose of the Holy Month of Ramadhan

In the Name of God; the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may learn self-restraint.” Qur’an 2:183

Al-Shaikh As-Saduq in an authentic Hadith quoted from Imam Ar-Ridha’ (a.s.) from his fathers up to Imam Ali (a.s.) that: On the last Friday of Sha’ban the Prophet of Islam (S) ascended the pulpit and delivered a lecture to the Muslims. He said:

"O you people, verily the month of Allah is approaching you with blessings, mercy and forgiveness, a month which is the best month in Allah’s view. Its days are the best days and its nights are the best nights and its hours are the best hours. It is a month in which you are invited to be Allah’s guests and chosen to be of those with Divine honour. Your breathing in this month is counted as Tasbeeh and your sleep as worshipping. Your rituals are accepted and your prayers are granted. So, ask Allah, your Lord, with a sincere intention and a purified heart, to give you good luck for fasting and reciting His Book. Since, unlucky is the one who misses God’s forgiveness in such a great month.

Remember, while you are hungry and thirsty the hunger and the thirst of the Hereafter. Pay charity to the poor and the needy. Respect your elders and be kind to the younger. Visit your relatives. Save your tongue from what you are not supposed to say, your eyes from what you are not supposed to look at, and your ears from what you are not supposed to listen to.

Be humble to the orphans of other people so that your orphans would be humbled. Repent to Allah from your sins and raise your hands to Him for praying in your prayers time. Since, it’s the best time that Allah will be looking at His servants with mercy. He answers when He is whispered to, and grants when He is called upon, and responds when He is requested for.

O you people, verily, your spirit is held in pledge for your deeds, release it then by asking for forgiveness. Your back is heavy from your sins, lighten it by your long prostrations. Acknowledge that Allah the Almighty promised in the name of His Majesty that He would not punish those who pray and prostrate, nor does He frighten them by the Fire of Hell in the Hereafter.

O you people, whoever gives breakfast to a fasting believer in this month, s/he will be having the reward of freeing a slave as well as forgiveness for his/her previous sins. The prophet by then was asked, ‘what if someone was not able to invite people for breakfast?’ The prophet replied: ‘Safeguard yourselves from the Fire even with half a date or a glass of drink. Surely Allah will be giving the same reward to those who can not afford more than this.

O you people, whoever makes his/her behaviour better s/he will be proceeding easily on the Path (Serat) when many feet will tend to slip. Whoever reduces the chores of those who are working for him/her, Allah will be lightening his/her sinful account. Whoever restrains his/her devil from others, Allah will restrain His anger from him/her in the Hereafter. Whosoever cuts off his/her relations with his/her relatives Allah will cut off His blessings from him/her in the Hereafter.

Whoever performs recommended prayers, Allah will prescribe for him/her a discharge from the Fire. Whoever performs a daily Salat, s/he is going to have the equal reward of seventy Salat in other months. Whoever sends frequently, Salawat on me, Allah will make his/her positive account increased when it's going to be decreased. Whoever recites an Aya from the Holy Qur'an, s/he will be rewarded the equal reward of reciting the whole Qur'an in other months.

O people, verily, the gates of Paradise are open in this month. Ask your Lord not to close them to you. And the gates of Hell are closed in this month. Ask your Lord not to open them to you. Devils are handcuffed. Ask your Lord not to give them a free hand to you..." When the sermon was over, Imam Ali (a.s.) stood up and asked the Prophet, what was the best action in that month? The Prophet of Islam (S) replied:

'The best action in this month is to restrain from whatever Allah has forbidden.'

Ramadhan Awareness

In the Name of God; the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Definition of Ramadhan

Ramadhan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is the month during which Muslims observe fasting from morning twilight (Fajr Prayer) to the evening twilight (Maghreb Prayer). The term Ramadhan is literally driven from al-Ramd which means 'burning heat of the sun'.¹¹ It is believed that this name is given to the fasting month due to the thirst experienced during fasting.

It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (S) that the name is given to the fasting month because fasting burns the sins.¹² According to some narrations 'Ramadhan' is one of the Names of Allah and hence the more appropriate way to refer to the month of fasting is to say "The Month of Ramadhan", not Ramadhan.¹³

We should however bear in mind that the term 'Ramadhan' without the prefix 'the month' is mentioned in many Hadiths with reference to the month of fasting. Hence, it seems the recommendation for the expression of 'the month of Ramadhan' is with respect to the Qur'anic expression as mentioned in Surah 2, Ayah 185, and as an honour to this holy month, which is referred to in the words of the Prophet (S) 'the month of Allah'.

Significance of the Month of Ramadhan

Ramadhan is the holiest month in the Islamic calendar. Fasting is prescribed in this month. It is a month in which the holy Qur'an was revealed [2:185]. According to some traditions 'the Scriptures' of Ibrahim, the Torah of Moses and the Psalms of David (peace be upon his pure progeny and all the previous prophets) were all revealed in the month of Ramadhan.

It is narrated from Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s): *"Verily, the month of Ramadhan is a month in which the holy Qur'an was revealed. It was in this month that the Prophet of Islam was infirmed of being a Prophet. The Night of al-Qadr which is better than one thousand months and therein every matter of ordainments is decreed¹⁴ is in this month."*¹⁵

¹¹ Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, al-Mufradat.

¹² Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol.58. p.341

¹³ Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol.4 p.69

¹⁴ The Holy Qur'an 44:4

¹⁵ Al-Hurr al-Ameli, Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol.10 p.242

The Benefits of Fasting

Fasting is an obligation in Islam not an option. It is one of the five pillars on which Islam is built. The benefits of fasting are manifold. Fasting has personal, social, hygienic and best of all spiritual benefits.

Hisham Ibn Hakam asked Imam As-Sadiq (a.s) about the reason(s) because of which fasting has been made obligatory. The Imam replied: *“Verily, Allah made fasting obligatory in order to equalize between the poor and the rich. Surely, the rich people would not otherwise feel the pain of hunger to be kind to the poor. For the rich will reach anything they wish. Thus, the Almighty Allah willed to equalize between His servants and to give a taste of the pain of hunger to the rich so that he becomes more lenient to the weak people and be more merciful towards the hungry ones.”*¹⁶

Although fasting has some social benefits, this is not the main purpose of fasting. Thus, fasting is obligatory both on the poor and the rich. The main purpose of fasting is to gain ‘self-restraint’ as stated in the holy Qur’an:

“O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may observe self-restraint (al-Taqwa).” [2:183]

None is needless of self-restraint. Even the Prophet of Islam and the pure Imams (s.a) needed to maintain their high standards of piety by the virtue of fasting. Thus, fasting is mandatory for all Muslims.

Unique Characteristics of Fasting

Fasting, like praying and pilgrimage to Hajj, is worshipping. Nonetheless, it has its own unique characteristics. The following are some of the unique characteristics of fasting.

- The longest worshipping: Fasting is the longest worshipping of God. Daily Prayers will not take more than one hour every day at most. Pilgrimage to Hajj will not take more than a few weeks in a life time. The worshipping of fasting is about 12 to 16 hours (depending on the season and your geographical location) and lasts for a whole month every year. In other words, a faster typically spends more than 400 hours within one month for worshipping Allah! Isn't this amazing?!
- Does not interrupt your daily life: Fasting unlike other types of worshipping does not interrupt our daily transactions. One cannot normally offer his/her daily prayers whilst working. You ought to take a break from your work, perform your Wudhu, find a suitable place and offer your Salat. Pilgrimage

¹⁶ As-Saduq, al-Faqih vol.2 p.43.

to Hajj is even more so interrupting your daily life. Fasting exceptionally is the only type of worshipping that can be observed whilst one is doing his normal daily work. It does not interrupt your worldly life at all. Amazingly a faster is still in the state of worshipping Allah even if he/she is asleep. Fasting is only in conflict with sinning.

- Worshipping God without any action: All other types of worshipping consist of some actions. Take the example of daily Prayers. It is the combination of some recitation of the Qur'an, some Thikr in different postures. The same applies to Hajj, Zakat etc. Fasting is the only of worshipping of Allah that amazingly consists of some non-doings! Fasting is avoidance of drinking, eating etc. a faster does not require doing anything. It is enough no to do anything! This is the reason why it is in no conflict with our daily lives.

- The most sincere worshipping: Worshipping God is like a perfume kept in its container. Once the lid is opened the fragrance flies and only its tasteless liquid remains. The best worshipping is the most secret of all. Once its seal is broken it may be spoiled by showing off. All other types of worshipping are prone to show off. Salat, which is meant to be offered in a group for its public nature is prone to showing off and hence can be easily void. Pilgrimage to hajj is even more prone to showing off. Fasting, however, is the only worshipping of Allah that none other than God would really know if you are fasting. Fasting is an inner worshipping and hence it can be the most sincere worshipping.

- The only worshipping act that there is a penalty (expiation) if missed deliberately. If any Muslim misses his daily Prayers even deliberately, although he has committed a mortal sin, he only has to make up the lapsed Prayers, there is no penalty involved in it. The same applies if one misses his pilgrimage to Hajj. Fasting is the only worshipping act that if it is deliberately missed in addition to making it up, there is a hefty penalty for it. Abdullah Ibn Sanan in an authentic Hadith narrated from Imam As-Sadiq (a.s) about the expiation against someone who has deliberately-and without any religious justification- broken one day of fasting saying: "*He must free a slave or fast two months or feed sixty poor people, but if he was unable to do so, he must give charity as much as he can.*"¹⁷ This penalty becomes even heftier if the person has broken his fast with something Haraam such as drinking alcohol or masturbation.

The Rewards of Fasting

Fasting is one of the most sincere worshipping of God and hence its rewards are numerous. The following are some of the narrations about the abundant rewards of fasting.

- The reward of fasting is numerous: The Almighty Allah states:

¹⁷ Al-Hurr al-A'meli, Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 10, p.45, Hadith 12789

“And seek help in patience and the Prayers.” [2:45]

Patience in the above Ayah is interpreted to fasting, as fasting requires patience. A faster is therefore patient. The Almighty Allah with reference to the reward of the patient states:

“Only those who are patient shall receive their reward in full without reckoning.” [39:10]

• Allah is the reward of fasting: It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (S): *“The Almighty Allah says:*

‘For every good deed there are ten to seven hundred times rewards, save fasting. For fasting is for Me and I am the reward of it.’”¹⁸

Surely, what else would a faster wish for after having Allah as his reward and what would he have should he be deprived of the Presence of Allah. It is to this effect that the Messenger of Allah (S) reported to have said: *“Only if you know what you may gain in the month of Ramadhan you would have remembered God much thankfully.”¹⁹*

• Seven compulsory rewards of fasting: It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (S): *“No believer fasts the month of Ramadhan for the sake of Allah but the Almighty Allah will definitely grant him seven rewards: 1) It will melt the Haraam from his body, 2) It will bring him close to the Mercy of Allah, 3) It will rectify the mistake²⁰ of his father; Adam, 4) Allah will ease for him the stupor of death, 5) He will secure him from the thirst and the hunger of the Day of Judgment, 6) Allah will grant him liberation from Hell fire, and 7) Allah will feed him from the pure things of Paradise.”²¹*

• Worshipping Allah even when asleep: As mentioned earlier fasting is the only type of worshipping Allah that is in no conflict with our day to day transactions. It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (S): *“A faster is in worshipping God even if he is asleep in his bed as long as he does not back-bite any Muslim.”*

• Special Entrance for the fasters: It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (S): *“There is a special entrance to Paradise called ‘al-Rayyan’ (satisfaction) none will enter through that gate save the fasters.”²²*

¹⁸ Muhsen al-Kashani, al-Mahajjatul-Baydha, vol.2 p121 The above translation is based on the passing reading of the verb ‘Ojza’ in the Arabic text. If the verb is read in an active format it should be translated: “Fasting is for Me and I will reward it.”

¹⁹ Al-Hurr al-A’meli, Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol.10 p.243

²⁰ ‘mistake’ here is meant for what Adam would be better not to do. I have dealt with this issue in “Original Sin; Myth or Truth”

²¹ Al-Hurr al-A’meli, Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol.10 p.241

²² Al-Hurr al-A’meli, Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol.10 p.241

• Angels pray for the faster: Angels are infallible and their prayers are granted, especially if they are commanded by Allah to pray. It is narrated from Imam Al-Baqir (a.s): *“Surely, the Almighty Allah has appointed a group of angels for the fasters. They seek Allah’s forgiveness for them in every day of Ramadhan to the end of it. They cry to the fasters every evening at the time the fasters break their fast: Glad tidings for you, O servants of Allah! Indeed you hungered for a little while but you will be satisfied for long. You are blessed and the blessing is in you. Until when it is the last night of the month of Ramadhan, they cry out: Glad tidings for you O servants of Allah. Indeed the Almighty Allah forgave your previous sins and accepted your repentance. Thus, watch how you will act in your new file.”*²³

• Ten consecutive years of fasting grants Paradise: Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Karkhi said: “I heard Imam Hasan (a.s) saying to a man in his house: *“O Aba Haroun! Whoever fasts ten consecutive months of Ramadhan will enter Paradise .”*²⁴

The Punishment of Not Fasting

To be deprived of all the promised rewards of fasting is the most severe punishment. Fasting is an obligation in Islam denial of which equals blasphemy. *“Whoever Muslim does not fast during the month of Ramadhan (without any valid reason), has lost his spirit of Faith,”* narrated from Imam As-Sadiq (a.s).²⁵

If one breaks his fast deliberately he has to compensate it with sixty days of fasting or feeding sixty poor people. If he breaks his fast with that which is Haraam in itself, such as drinking alcohol or masturbation and the like, then he has to compensate it for every day with sixty days of fasting in addition to the day he did not fast as well as feeding sixty poor people.

Sighting of the New Moon

Fasting is prescribed in the month of Ramadhan. The Islamic calendar is Lunar. Ramadhan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The advantage of the lunar based calendar is that the observation of the months is easily possible for all people. One needs to be acquainted with astronomy or refer to a reliable calendar to find out about the solar based calendar. Otherwise, you will not have any idea when, for example, the first day of October is going to be.

²³ Al-Hurr al-A’meli, Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol.10 p.243

²⁴ As-Saduq, al-Khisal p.445, The Hadith includes also those who miss their fasting with a valid excuse-such as illness- and make it up during the year.

²⁵ Al-Hurr al-A’meli, Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol. 10, p.246, Hadith 13325

The lunar calendar can easily be observed by all people by sighting the moon. The moon is the only natural satellite of earth. The moon is the second brightest object in Earth's sky, after the Sun. Thus, its observation requires not astronomical equipment. Even the crescent moon is nearly always visible by naked eyes.

The Moon has no light and it shines by reflecting the light of the Sun. The moon moves in an elliptical (oval-shaped) orbit around Earth at an average speed of 3,700 km/h. For the Moon to go from one phase to the next similar phase-as seen from Earth-it requires 29 days 12 hours and 44 minutes. This period is called a lunar month. On the observation of the new moon with a naked eye, the lunar month will be either 29 days or 30 days depending on the angle and the height at which the new moon is sighted.

The Moon shows progressively different phases as it moves along its orbit around the Earth. Half the Moon is always in sunlight, just as half of Earth has day while the other half has night. In the phase called the new moon, the near side is completely in shadow. About a week after a new moon, the Moon is in first quarter, resembling a luminous half-circle; another week later, the full moon shows its fully lit near side; a week afterwards, in its last quarter, the Moon appears as a half-circle again. The entire cycle is repeated each lunar month.

With a bit of experimental observation any individual will be able to identify the age of the moon and hence the day and the month he is in.

In order to facilitate the observation of the Islamic rituals for all Muslims, the Islamic calendar is lunar based. The Almighty Allah states in the Qur'an:

“They ask you about the new moons. Say: these are signs to mark fixed periods of time for mankind and for the pilgrimage.” [2:189]

It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (S) that ‘the fixed period of time’ is for observing the fasting of Ramadhan and breaking of the fast at the end of the month as well as for observation of the Hajj ceremony.

Fast When You Have Observed the New Moon

Numerous Hadith state: *“Start the fasting by sighting the crescent moon (of Ramadhan) and stop fasting by sighting the crescent moon (of Shawwal).”*²⁶

²⁶ Al-Khulayni, Al-Kafi, vol.4 p.76

Authentic narrations also state that if the new moon was not visible due to the clouds or similar obstacles, one must complete the days of the month to 30 days. If a day is doubtful whether it is the last day of Sha'ban or the first day of Ramadhan, it is **Haraam** to fast with the intention of the first day of Ramadhan. It is however recommended to observe the fasting of that day but with the intention of the last day of Sha'ban as a Mustahab fasting.

One cannot make up his/her Qada (lapsed) fasting on that day either. Similarly, one must continue fasting of the doubtful day at the end of Ramadhan, until it is proven to be the day of Eid. If one however completed the fast and then found out that it was the day of Eid, there is no sin on him as his intention was not to fast on the day of Eid. In short, the general rule about doubtful days is to complete the day of the month to 30 days.

“You must complete the number (of days).” [2:185]

Ali Ibn al-Qasani narrated: “I wrote to Imam As-Sadiq (a.s) while I was in Madina if we had to fast on the day which is doubtful whether it is the first day of Ramadhan or the last day of Sha'ban. The Imam (a.s) replied back:

*‘Doubt shall not enter certainty. Observe fasting when you see the new moon (of Ramadhan) and break your fast when you see the new moon (of Shawwal).’*²⁷

Criteria for Sighting the Crescent Moon

The Moon is a celestial body. In order for us to observe a celestial body in the sky two main criteria are involved. 1) The object must be bright enough, 2) Because the earth is spherical; the altitude of the object at the horizon must be high enough to reach the angle of human eye sight. [Fig.1]

Figure 1. A new crescent moon

Although the Moon is the second brightest body in the Earth's sky, it has no light from itself. Thus, in order for the new crescent moon to be visible it has to be at a certain angle with the Sun to reflect the sunlight. This will be achieved if the moonset is at least 47 minutes after the sunset.

That means the age of the new moon at local sunset must be 24 hours plus or minus 2 hours. In astronomical terminology this means the difference in azimuth between Sun and Moon shall not be less than 25 degrees while the Moon's altitude at sunset is not less than 12 degrees.²⁸

²⁷ Al-Hurr al-A'meli, Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol.10 pp.255-256

Although there are other criteria also involved in sighting the crescent moon such as brightness of the evening sky, contrast requirements of the eye, atmospheric reflection, etc, the above two mentioned criteria are the main.

We also have to bear in mind that the Moon usually²⁹ rises from the west whereas the sun rises from the east. Thus, the probability of visibility of the new moon decreases to the east. That means people at the western parts of the world will be the first to sight the new moon whilst the Far East being the last. This will sometimes result in one day difference between the western sight and the eastern sight of the moon.

Methods of Ascribing the First Day of a Lunar Month

The Grand Ayatollah Seestani in his Islamic Laws explains the methods of ascribing the first day of a lunar month as follows:

“1739. The first day of a month is established in the following four ways:

- If a person himself sights the moon.
- If a number of persons confirm to have sighted the moon and their words assure or satisfy a person. Similarly, every other thing which assures or satisfies him about the moon having being sighted.
- If two just (Adil) persons say that they have sighted the moon at night. The first day of the month will not be established if they differ about the details of the new moon. This difference can be either explicit or even implied.

For example, when a group of people go out in search of the new moon and none but two Adils claim to have seen the new moon, though, among those who did not see, there were other Adils equally capable and knowledgeable, then the testimony by the two Adils will not prove the advent of a new month.

- If 30 days pass from the first of Sha'ban, the first of Ramadhan will be established, and if 30 days pass from the first of Ramadhan the first of Shawwal will be established.

²⁸ The above criteria is for the best sighting, otherwise subject to other atmospheric conditions, it is still possible to sight the moon when the altitude is nine degree or above.

²⁹ The rise of the moon rarely starts from the southern part of the earth coming up to the north.

1740. The first day of any month will not be proved by the verdict of a Mujtahed and it is better to observe precaution.

1741. The first day of any month will not be proved by the prediction made by the astronomers. However, if a person derives full satisfaction and certitude from their finding, he should act accordingly.

1742. If the moon is high up in the sky, or sets late, it is not an indication that the previous night was the first night of the month. Similarly, if there is a halo round it, it is not a proof that the new moon appeared in the previous night.

1743. If the first day of the month of Ramadhan is not proved for a person and he does not observe fast, and if it is proved later that the preceding night was in fact the night of Ramadhan, he should observe qada of that day.

1744. If the first day of a month is proved in a city, it is also proved in other cities if they are united in their horizon. And the meaning of having a common horizon in this matter is that if the new moon was sighted in a city, there would a distinct possibility of sighting it in the other cities, if there were no impediments, like, the clouds etc.

1745. The first day of a month is not proved by a telegram except when one is sure that the telegram is based on the testimony of two Adils, or on a source which is reliable in the eyes of Shariah.

1746. If a person does not know whether it is the last day of Ramadhan or the first day of Shawwal, he should observe fast on that day, and if he comes to know during the day that it is the first of Shawwal, he should break the fast.”³⁰

Du’a at the Time of Sighting the New Moon

Jaber narrated from Imam Al-Baqir (a.s): “When the Messenger of Allah (S) was sighting the crescent moon of Ramadhan he would stand towards the Qiblah whilst raising his hands saying:

“O Allah! Welcome the new month for us with security and faith and safety and Islam and good health and abundant sustenance and keeping away of diseases. O Allah! Grant us to fast (during the

³⁰ Note that this month the moon will be rising from the southern hemisphere to the north and hence its altitude on Saturday in the Middle East is lower than Oceania.

days) in this month and stand for prayer (at night) and recite the Qur'an in it. O Allah! Protect Ramadhan for us and protect us for it and protect us in it.”³¹

The Etiquettes of Fasting

- Avoid Haraam Deeds: Fasting begins with avoiding eating and drinking but does not stop on them. It is expected from a fasting person to control his tongue from all types of verbal sins such as gossiping, swearing, lying etc. Similarly, he is expected to avoid any Haram food. A fasting person is not expected to break his fast at a restaurant that its Halal food is not confirmed. He should also avoid the invitation of people whom he is not sure about their Halal meal.

A fasting person should also observe all his/her prayers on time. Girls and ladies are expected to observe the Islamic dress code of Hijab. Muslims who fast without refraining from sins may not find more than mere thirst and hunger. I have elaborated more on this etiquette of fasting in 'The Intermediate Stage of Fasting'.

- Recitation of the Holy Qur'an: the month of Ramadhan is a month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed. According to a Prophetic Narration *“Everything has a best season and the best season of Qur'an is Ramadhan.”*

- Nightly Supplications (Du'a): The nights of Ramadhan are the best time for supplication and invoking Allah. There is a unique Ayah in the Qur'an with reference to the significance of Du'a which is revealed amidst the Ayaat of Ramadhan. The Almighty Allah in Surah al-Baqarah states:

“And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls upon Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.” [2:186]

The single pronoun 'Me' or 'My' or 'I' is repeated seven times in this Ayah.

- Paying Charity

- Napping: The month of Ramadhan changes our sleeping patterns. For those who are not used to being awake at dawn, their sleeping hours feel interrupted. Many fasters suffer from fatigue more than hunger or thirst. A short nap during the day regenerates the body and also helps the faster for

³¹ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi vol.4 p.70

night supplication. It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (S): *“The sleeping of a faster is worshipping and his breathing is glorification.”*³²

- It is narrated from Imam Kadhim (a.s): *“Take a nap, for surely, Allah will feed and satisfy the faster in his sleep.”*³³

- Praying Maghreb before breaking the fast: Of the etiquettes of fasting is to offer the Maghreb Prayer and then break the fast. However, if the faster is too weak to pray or there are other people who wish to break their fast first and they wait for him, then he should break his fast first. Zorarah and Fodhayl narrated from Imam Al-Baqir (a.s): *“It is better in the month of Ramadhan to pray then break your fast unless there are people waiting for you to break their fast. Then do not disagree with them. Break your fast with them and then pray, otherwise, offer your prayer first.”* Zorarah and Fodhayl asked why praying before breaking fast is more virtuous? The Imam (a.s) explained: *“This is because the time for two obligations has arrived; breaking the fast and Salat and I would prefer to begin with the more virtuous of the two. Obviously, Salat is more virtuous. When you pray whilst you are still fasting, your Salat will be written as the Salat of a fasting person which is more desirable to me.”*³⁴

- Inviting Muslims for Breakfast: Hospitality and generosity is a virtue in Islam. It is a sign of believing in Allah and the Day of Judgment that one opens his house to visitors. The Almighty JAllah will forgive certain sins of a hospitable Muslim. Of the strongly recommended etiquettes of the month of Ramadhan is to invite a fasting person over for Iftar. It is narrated from Imam As-Sadiq (a.s): *“Whoever provides breakfast for a fasting person will have the same reward (of fasting).”*³⁵ It is even narrated from Imam Kadhim (a.s) that *“The reward of feeding a fasting person is more than fasting itself.”*³⁶ Hospitality is more rewarding when one invites poor Muslims and their near of kin and more pious people. One can also sponsor a poor family and send the money to them for their Ramadhan expenses. Imam As-Sadiq (a.s) narrated: *“My grandfather; Zainul-Abidin (a.s) used to cook a sheep whilst he was fasting and in the evening would distribute it all to different families. He would then break his fast with bread and dates.”*³⁷

- Eating Sohoor: Some fasters skip the Sohoor (eating at dawn). They are either too lazy to get up at that time of the morning or not used to eating that early. These people usually have something late at night before they go to bed and don't get up for Sohoor. Ironically they may even miss their Fajr

³² Al-Hurr al-A'meli, Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol.10 p.137

³³ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi vol.4 p.65

³⁴ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi vol.4 p.101

³⁵ Al-Hurr al-A'meli, Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol.10 p.138.

³⁶ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi, vol.4 p.67

³⁷ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi, vol.4 p.68

prayers. Their typical excuse is that they need sleeping more than food. Although having Sohoor is not compulsory, it is strongly recommended in Ramadhan. Imam As-Sadiq (a.s) in response to the one who asked if Sohoor is compulsory said: *“It is permissible not to have Sohoor if he so wishes, but in the month of Ramadhan it is more virtuous to have Sohoor. We like people not to miss it in the month of Ramadhan.”*³⁸

Sawm of Wesal’ is forbidden in Islam. That is to fast from one evening to another. In another narration the Messenger of Allah (S) said: “Have Sohoor even if it is a glass of water. Be aware! The Blessings of Allah is upon those who have Sohoor.”³⁹

The purpose of Sohoor is not just to feed the body. Waking up for Sohoor is a good exercise of being awake at the holy time of dawn. Throughout one month the Almighty Allah trains us to wake up at least half an hour before the Fajr prayer to merely eat! To enforce the training, Allah forbids us to eat and drink from Fajr to the evening. Then lest we feel hungry or thirsty we Endeavour to wake up at that early time. After one month of consecutive Sohoor, a faster is used to waking up early. Thus, the main purpose of Sohoor is to learn to virtuous practice of early rising.

- Breaking the Fast With Milk and Dates: It is narrated from Imam As-Sadiq (a.s): *“The first thing that the Messenger of Allah (S) was breaking his fast with was a ripe date, if it was its season, or dried date in other seasons.”*⁴⁰ It is also narrated that Imam Ali (a.s) would prefer to break the fast with milk. Other narrations suggest that in the absence of milk or dates, Ahlul-Bait (a.s) would break their fast with water. For it will cleanse the stomach and liver and relieve headaches.⁴¹

³⁸ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi, vol.4 p.94.

³⁹ Al-Hurr al-A’meli, Wasa’il ash-Shi’ah, vol.10 p.144

⁴⁰ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi, vol.4 p.153.

⁴¹ Al-Khulayni, al-Kafi, vol.4 p.152.

Common Halal and Non-Halal Sea Foods

Imam Husain Islamic Centre

"Eat any fish that has scales, and do not eat what does not have scales."

Imam Al-Baqir (a.s.)

[Al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, Vol.6, p. 219]

no.	Halal	non-Halal
1	Anchovies	Basa
2	Barramundi	Calamari
3	Bass	Catfish Eels
4	Carp / bream	Clams
5	Cod / hake	Eastern Cleaner- Clingfish
6	Dory	Crab Cray Fish
7	Flathead	Flake
8	Flounder	Grayfish
9	Herring	Leather Jacket
10	Hoki - <i>Blue Grenadier</i>	Lobster
11	Jew fish	Marlin
12	Kingfish	Muscles
13	Ling	Octopus
14	Mackerel – <i>except for snake mackerel</i>	Oyster

- | | | |
|----|--|----------------------------|
| 15 | Perch | Snails |
| 16 | Prawns | Snake
Mackerels |
| 17 | Red fish | Squab |
| 18 | Salmon | Squid |
| 19 | Sardines | Shark |
| 20 | Shrimp | Sturgeons |
| 21 | Snapper | Swordfish |
| 22 | Tailor | |
| 23 | Trevally | |
| 24 | Trout - <i>But not including: European turbot (Scophthalmus maximus or Psetta maximusTrevally).</i> | |
| 25 | Tuna <i>except for Dogtooth Tuna also known as Peg Tooth Tuna & Scaleless Tuna.</i> | |
| 26 | Whitefish | |
| 27 | Whiting | |
| 28 | Yellow tail | |