

Fasts and its relevance in Islam

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ABSTRACT

Fasting is the deeds of sacrifice and its purpose is to cleanse the body, soul, and spirit from the imputation. The practice of fasting keeps control of human desires and develop the ability to comply with moral and spiritual values. The vehement of fasting realizes the feelings of others, and the person tends towards humanity and humility. It encourages generosity and philanthropy. The main purposes of this deed are to abstain from worldly and sordid object despite availability. This prevents man from wrongdoing and sin. The rituals of fasting change the lifestyle and a person experiences the variances of life. It also makes purification of the body from toxins, rejuvenation of body and reducing the weight. The accomplishment of the fasting is to prepare a vigilant and sound conscience citizen.

1. Introduction

Many people think that fasting is an experience of feeling the hunger and thirst but in reality, fasting is an act of giving up and surrendering. It is an effort of self-assessment that what we can live without God's blessings and cates, and in this cause people to sacrifice their desire, surrendering the sustenance and suspending the food for a span of some time. The fasting is religious and a cultural ritual since ancient times to cures the soul and body. This is a course of self-abstain for spiritual and medical discipline. Almost all religions prescribed the tradition of fasting. The religious philosophies and medical science also decoded the benefits of fasting.

In ancient times, there was a ritual of fast to maintain peace and to avoid catastrophes. Also, some people were keeping fast before making any important decisions or before going to battle. These practices were for assuaging and closeness to God and devotees believed that it would bring physical and spiritual discipline and power. In Islam, Fasting is considered as prayer, and it has been prescribed for to prevent bad habits, to erase the sadness and mourning, and for purification, penance and spiritual upliftment.

2. Genesis of Fasting in Islam

The word fasting in the Islam is derived from the Arabic word "sawm", meaning "deliberate stoppage." The literally meaning is to abstinence and restrain from eating, drinking and marital relation¹. In Persian and Urdu, the word "Roza" is used for fasts. The meaning of self-restraint according to Islamic doctrine is that man's psyche exercises blanket control on his body and its energies, and the requisition and desires of baser-self should be in its clutches to make them abide by its demands. Psyche occupies the same position in a human body as that of a ruler in his empire. Body and its different parts are the subordinates of the psyche².

According to Holy Quran the Virgin Mary (Maryam) is told to take a pledge of silence which is interpreted as a fast³ "And if you see anyone, say: I have made a vow of sawm to the Merciful One, and I will speak to no one on this day". The reference of fasting came numerous times in the Holy Quran

and Hadith with different conditions, where the prescription for fasts and its regulations are outlined. According to Islamic jurisprudence fasting requires abstinence from the ingesting food or drink (even by injection), smoking and sexual intercourse.

3. Significance of Fasting

Fasting is a kind of worship in Islam, which develops morality and spirituality. The adherents surrender and make submission himself to the creator. The rituals of fasting are highly esteemed in Islamic theology. It is considered one of the pillars of the Islamic faith. The Qur'an and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (saw)) has elaborated the pragmatic details and rationale of fasting rites. As the Holy Quran⁴ mentioned that "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you that you may become righteous." The consequence of fasts protect from the sins and also the betterment of hereafter, as in one of tradition⁵ ascribed as "Fasting is a shield from the Hellfire just like the shield of any of you in battle." There are mainly two kinds of fasting. One is obligatory fasting which observed during the month of Ramzan by every adherent, the other is optional fasting and observed throughout the year and on a special occasion. There are also some days when fasting is forbidden i.e. on the day of Eid al Fitr, Eid al Adha and the three days after the Eid al Adha etc.

1. **Obligatory Fasting:** - Fasting during the month of Ramzan is compulsory. This is known as "Fard or Wajib" in Arabic and Urdu. It was made obligatory in the second year of the Hijrah or Islamic calendar corresponds to 624 AD. The fasting is compulsory to all healthy adult Muslims both men and women. However, there is some concession is given to adherents. The traveler, patient, pregnant, breastfeeding mother, and women during mensuration have a relaxation from the fasting.
2. **Optional Fasting:** - This is voluntary deeds and this kind of fasts might be kept when all obligatory fasts have been fulfilled. The adherents have been observing this fast other than the month of Ramzan.

This fast is known as "Sunnah." The Muslim keep fasts for the purpose of winning Allah's special favors, some to ward off their problems and salvation from the sins, etc. There are several traditions are available which emphasizes for the fasts. The Optional Fasting is observed in the month of Shaban, Shawwal, and first nine days of Dhul-Hijjah month. There is also recommended to keep fasts on Monday, Thursday, and Friday throughout the year.

Apart from this, Islamic jurisprudence mention the fast of Kaffara fast (compensational fast), Qaza (making up), Etekaf (seclusion in the mosque), and Mannat (vowed or committed). Kaffara fasts are imposed when someone accidental and unintentionally committed some wrong thing, and in the atonement of that mistake, the person has to keep fast. Qaza fasts are required when someone genuinely unable to keep an obligatory fast during the month of Ramazan.

Etekaf is a meditational practice where people sits inside the mosque for a period and almost disconnect himself with the remaining world and pray, fasts and recite Holy Quran and supplication, etc. A person vowed and make a commitment that if he will succeed or achieve then he will keep the fast⁶.

There is a pre-dawn meal, known as "sahur or sehri", before the beginning of fasts. The Muslims break their fast in the evening called "Iftar". Most of the people prefer to break their fast with dates or warm water because this menu is attributed to the tradition of the prophet. The Prophet used to break the fasts with dates. The timing of fasts starts from dawn when the whiteness in the sky starts to spread before sunrise and continue to till the sunset. In this period, Muslims not only abstains from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual activity, but also self-restraint from lying, arguing, and back-biting, etc. because these things nullify the fasts.

4. Philosophy of Fasts

The human personality consists of the body and spirit/soul, and these are affected by diseases and corruption. A person has to need proper upkeep for their life to prevent these harmful things. And in this purpose, the adherents always make a renewal of their life and adopt self-discipline with virtues of piety and righteousness. They devote towards divinity by prayer, worship, recitation of the Holy Qur'an and charity. People connect with others, and identify with them and develop a sense of care and sympathy. Fasts gradually reduce the physical desire present in the human being, because it reminded of every moment of hunger that it is to follow a divine order. To maintain the dignity of fast, it is also necessary to abstention from every form of lust and carnal passion⁷.

The motivation behind fasting is to develop the nature of righteousness. This is a spiritual course that is intended for self-purification and enlightenment. The practices of fasts develop the quality of man kindness. The human being restrained from corrupt deeds and control on their contemplations and desires. An individual through fasts make balances between the fulfillment and satisfaction of both the body's and the spirit/soul's requirements. The main ethos of fasts and other prayers in Islam is to development of God-consciousness. As

the Holy Quran⁸ says, "And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive." The intent of this holy verse is for prayer and fasts. Fasting is an ascetic practice where patience is most needed.

The virtues of fasts elaborates the human personality and thoughts, as Ayatollah Mohammedi Rayshahri⁹ describes such as "fasting fosters wisdom, and wisdom leads to understanding, and understanding leads to certainty, and if the servant is certain, the circumstances of his life and the situation in which he finds himself, whether difficulty or ease, will not matter to him." Fasting has multiple benefits for healthy survival. The fasts impact on the health of the human body and spirit. A narration¹⁰ of Prophet attributes regarding the benefit of fasts that "Fast and you shall attain good health." The fasting is a divine prescription for self-reassurance and control. It develops the affinity of social solidarity and fraternity, and prepares society in line of discipline and healthy survival.

5. Fast of Ramzan:-

Ramzan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. In Arabic, It is called "Ramadan" while in Persian and Urdu language is used as "Ramzan". Ramzan is the holiest month in the Islamic doctrine. It is considered to be the month of the Quran. The fasting during the month of Ramzan is associated with revelation of the Holy Qur'an. As the Holy Quran¹¹ mentioned that, "In the month of Ramzan the Qur'an was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore whoever of you is present in that month let him fast. But who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on. Allah desires your well-being, not your discomfort. He desires you to fast the whole month so that you may magnify Him and render thanks to Him for giving you His guidance." Therefore, Muslims have the tradition of fasting, reciting the Holy Qur'an and giving charities. The last 10 nights of odd days of the month of Ramzan is known as the Night of Decree or the Night of Power (Laylatul-Qadr). It is believed that it was the night when the Quran was brought down from heavenly abode (Baytul M'amur) for angels (Gabriel) to reveal in parts onto the Prophet. The Holy Quran¹² says that "Surely, We have sent it (the Qur'an) down in the night of Qadr." Muslim celebrate this night with pious and reverence. They stay awake the whole night and pray for guidance, blessings, and forgiveness.

The fasting month of Ramzan ends with Eid ul-Fitr on the first of Shawwal. This is the occasion for the thank to God and remembers his blessings. There is a special charity are done, which is called zakat al fitr. Zakat al-Fitr must be paid during Ramzan or before Eid al-Fitr prayers so that the poor and needy can enjoy the day of Eid. The minimum amount of zakat al fitr is the equivalent of about 3 kg of wheat or its flour, rice or other main foodstuff used throughout the year per member of the household including dependents and guest.

Muslim around the world commemorate this occasion with great zeal. Gifts are often given especially to children and poor. These gifts are in the form of money and/or accessories and are called "Eidi".

6. Conclusion

In Islam, The fast is a form of worship to connectedness to the almighty God. It has been emphasizing that a person can seek inner peace and satisfaction through auspicious deeds in this world and reward in the hereafter. Fasting during the month of Ramzan and its spiritual activities purify the mankind soul. A person re-approaches their character and behavior with the

help of worship and prayer. People try to become societal and interact each-others and feel the sentiment of poor and underprivileged and come forward to solve social and financial issues. The practice of fasting in religion is about meditation, thoughtfulness, and self-improvement.

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