

Search of Truth, Series-4

FASTING

Meaning and Purpose



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In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

The act and the motive

Allah (God) the Creator of man and this entire universe is one. God created man and made provision for fulfilment of all his needs. He gave man a comprehensive life support system to live on this planet. He also provided knowledge to answer his basic questions

Is there any creator of man? If yes, what role does he want for mankind? Why has man been created? What is the purpose of man's life? If there is any, what is the way to achieve that purpose? Has man been created free or is he helpless? How can a good life be led? What will happen after death? These typeity the basic questions whose answers man must know.

God chose some excellent individuals from among human beings. They were His Messengers. He sent them His Message, which is Guidance for all human beings. There came many Messengers from the first man and Messenger Hazrat Adam to the Last Messenger Hazrat Muhammad (peace be to them). They were sent to every people. All Messengers delivered the Message of God to people in their own language.

The question is : why were so many Messengers sent time and again? Due to lack of means of transportation and communication in the ancient time, it was indeed difficult to canvey the news from one place to another. The other reason is that people used to make unauthorised changes in the Message of God, to distort it. Then is was need to deliver the Message of God afresh.

All Messengers gave the same message that God is one; that the world is a place for test and evaluation; and that there is indeed life after death. While the message of all earlier Messengers was local, the message of the Last Messenger, Hazrat Muhammad (peace be to him) is univerrsal. God Himself has taken

the responsibility of protecting the Final Message (Qur'an) revealed to the Last Messenger. More than fourteen hundred years have passed, but no modification could be effected therein. The Message of God is available in its original form; so there is now no need of a new messenger.

The central theme of the Qur'an is man. The Qur'an presents the scheme of God about man. It says that man has been created by Allah and he has been given the present physical life. God has divided the tality of man's life into two parts: the period of life-till-death, which is temporal, is for the evaluation of man, and the period of life-after-death is for judgement about good or bad deeds done in the world; in the from of Paradise or Hell. This is the permanent, never-ending period. Death is in the form of Transition between the two.

The Qur'an says that the world is a place for evaluation. The purpose of man's life is the service of God. In the Qur'an (51-56) the meaning of service is to lead a God-centred life. This Service is not a part-time but full-time activity, which continues from birth to death. The whole life of man is indeed Service if it is spent in accordance with the Will of God. To make man committed to lead his life in accordance with the Will of God, it was necessary to prescribe some training; therefore, Salat (five-time prayers), fasting, zakat (poor due) and Haj were prescribed as means of training. Thus, by virtue of sacrifice of time, energy and wealth, man is trained onto the path of spiritual progress to make him true servant of God in his practical life. This training is regular activity so that man might be kept stable onto the path of virtue, for man's behaviour is affected from within and without.

God knows best what is beneficial to man and what is harmful. God wants wellbeing of man; this is why He has declared prohibited (haraam) all such deeds whereby man would have ruined himself, and called lbadah (service to God) and pronounced mandatory all such activities by not doing which man would have inflicted harm upon himself.

The Final Message of God, the Qur'an, started revealing first time in the world in the month of Ramadan. Therefore, the month of Ramadan is called the month of Qur'an. It was declared as a month of thanksgiving for the believers in the Qur'an and fasting in this entire month was made mandatory.

Fasting is an act of Ibadah. In Arabic, Fasting is called Saum. It means restraint and keeping silence. In the Qur'an the related term is Sabr, which means 'restraining oneself' and 'stability'. In Islam, fasting means abstaining from food and water and intimate relationship between husband and wife from dawn to sunset, for the sake of Allah alone. Mandatory fasts are kept only in the month of Ramadan and are obligatory for every adult Muslim. The Qur'an says:

"Believers! fasting is enjoined upon you, as it was enjoined upon those before you, that you become God-fearing and pious." (Qur'an, 2:183)

"During the month of Ramadan the Qur'an was sent down as a guidance to the people with Clear Signs of the true guidance and as the Criterion (between right and wrong). So those of you who live to see that month should fast it, and whoever is sick or on a journey should fast the same number of other days instead. Allah wants ease and not hardship for you so that you may complete the number of days required, glorify God for what He has guided you to, and give thanks to Him."

(Qur'an, 2:185)

Fasting is a very important act of Ibadah. In every nation, every Messenger enjoined fasting. Even today there is fasting in every religion in whatsoever form. According to the Qur'an, the purpose of fasting is to create in man piety or God-consciousness. One meaning of Taqwa (piety) is God-fearingness and the other is to adopt the precautionary way. God-fearingness is a

quality which protects man from going astray, viz. becoming unsuccessful.

It becomes evident from the Qur'anic verse,...that you become God-fearing and pious' - 2:183, that fasting creates in man God-fearingness and makes him pious (steadfast). The Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (peace be to him) said :

"Allah has no need for the hunger and the thirst of the person who does not restrain himself from telling lies and acting on them (even while observing the fast)."

(Hadith, Bukhari)

"Perhaps some fasting persons will gain nothing but hunger and thirst from fasting."

(Hadith, Al-Darimi)

Fasting makes every part of man obligated. Fasting of the eyes means the fasting person must not look at what God has prohibited. Fasting of the ears intends that the Person must not hear what God has prohibited. Fasting of the tongue wants him not to tell what God has prohibited him from. Fasting of the hands specifies that the person must not do what God has prohibited. Fasting of the legs requires him not to walk along where God has prohibited. Fasting of the mind implies that he must not think what God has prohibited. Simultaneously, fasting demands from the fasting person to do whatever God likes him to do. Fasting only in strict accordance with the way God has commanded can prove beneficial to man. The Messenger of God, Muhammad (peace be to him) said :

"The reward of every (good) deed of a person is multiplied from ten to seven hundred times. Allah says: 'The reward of observing fast is different from the reward of other good deeds; Fasting is for Me, and I Alone will give its reward as much as I would like'."

(Hadith, Bukhari and Muslim)

Fasting leaves a very good impact on man's body and mind both. Fasting is an annual training course. Its

purpose is to subject man to such a special training whereby he can lead a 'God-centred life' rather than a 'self-centred life'. Fasting creates self-discipline so that man might give right direction to his thoughts and actions. It balances man's control on himself. Man has feelings of anger, desires, greed, hunger and sex, etc. He can have only one of the two relations with each of them: either man controls it or it controls him. In the former stance, there is benefit while in the latter harm. Fasting teaches man how to control them, viz. protects him from crimes and sins.

Fasting increases man's self-confidence, steadfastness and will power. Man comes to realise that when he can abstain for whole day from food and water, without which life is not possible, he can give up evils and bad habits quite easily. One who can bear the pangs of hunger can bear other things as well. Fasting increases the Level of Tolerance in man.

Fasting removes Selfishness and Laziness. Fasting makes us realise the importance of the blessings of God like food and water, etc. It makes man a true, grateful slave of God. Fasting makes man realise the pangs of hunger and thirst so that he might be sympathetic to the hungry and the thirsty. It thus increases in man the Level of Sacrifice.

Thus we can realise that besides being a way to glorify God, express gratefulness to Him and be righteous after receiving Guidance from Him, fasting leaves a very good impact not only on man's mind but on his body as well. In the words of the Messenger of God, Muhammad (peace be to him), we can say :

"For everything there is a purification (Zakat), and the purification of body is the fast."
(Hadith, Ibn Majah)

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