

# Friday Sermon: Ramadhan -- Virtues of Fasting

July 12th, 2013

**‘O ye who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become righteous.’ [\(2:184\)](#)**

With the grace of God, Ramadan started here (the UK) from yesterday. Thank God that He has granted us the experience of yet another Ramadan. In the above verse God draws attention of true believers to the significance and obligation of fasting and has reminded them that communities of earlier Prophets were also prescribed fasting because fasting is essential for progress of faith as well as for spiritual progress. Although fasting in other religions has changed with time, yet the concept remains in some shape or form. We find fasting prescribed at the time of Hazrat Moses and Hazrat Daud (peace be on them both). Hindus also have fasting as part of their faith although their abstinence is only from cooked food. Christians also have the concept of fasting, some Christian denominations only abstain from eating meat when fasting and can eat vegetables.

Recently Hazrat Khalifatul Masih had the experience to see someone fasting in this manner. A Christian friend, whose name or the country they come from Huzoor refrained from divulging, sat near Huzoor at a dinner. Food was being served in plates and Huzoor noticed that the friend had not been served. When Huzoor asked him the reason he said that he was fasting. Respecting this, Huzoor stayed silent and was amazed that in spite of his standing as a politician he was abiding by his faith. Soon after Huzoor saw that he had been served vegetables and rice and said to him that he could eat those while fasting and he said yes, he would eat. Next, chicken was served in dishes and Huzoor noticed meat in the plate of the friend. As Huzoor is familiar with the guest, Huzoor asked him if he was allowed to eat chicken during his fast. He laughed and said those serving food had insisted and his faith teaches him that if the host offers you something, you should eat it. Such is state of fasting of people of ancient religions. The chicken was delicious, when he saw everyone around him eating - there were perhaps two people serving - he may have declined to one of the servers and accepted from the second out of courtesy. Thus courtesy took precedence over religious commandment because the books giving the religious teachings are not clear.

However, God Himself promised to safeguard the Holy Qur'an and believers are enjoined that if they believe then fasting for a month is obligatory on them during which they have to abstain from all food and drink in order to attain Taqwa (righteousness), to enhance in Taqwa and try and attain pleasure of God. Certainly, the Bible commands the disciples to fast to seek God's pleasure and not for pretentious reasons. Fasting enhances one's spirituality but the concept of atonement has negated the spirit of fasting, which is attainment of Taqwa. In this way it has made it devoid of its beneficence and fasting remains but in name leading one to move on from raw and boiled vegetables to cooked meat.

The Holy Qur'an enjoins fasting by making clear its objective and has given tiding of its reward. In order to keep its teaching alive, reformers and saints kept coming in Islam. Later, by sending the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) God facilitated revival and renaissance

of religious teachings for all, Muslims and non-Muslims. The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) said:

‘The third pillar of Islam is fasting. People are also unaware of the reality of fasting. The truth is one cannot talk about a place that one does not go to and is not aware about. Fasting is not merely staying hungry and thirsty; rather its reality and its impact can only be gained through experience. It is human nature that the less he eats the more his self/spirit is purified and his capacity for [spiritual] visions increases. The will of God is to decrease one kind of sustenance and to increase the other. A person who is fasting should always be mindful that he is not just required to stay hungry. On the contrary he should remain engaged in remembrance of God so that he can cut asunder ties of worldly desires and amusements and is wholly devoted to God. Hence, the significance of fasting is this alone that man gives up one kind of sustenance which only nourishes the body and attains the other kind of sustenance which is a source of comfort and gratification of the soul. Those who fast only for the sake of God and not as something which is customary, should remain engaged in Hamd (glorification of God), Tasbih (saying: SubhanAllah) and Tahleel (saying: La illaha illAllah) of Allah the Exalted, through which they will get the other sustenance.’ (Translated from Malfuzat, Vol. 9, pp. 122 – 123)

The above extract could have given the impression that starvation was the only way of purification of the self/spirit, therefore the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) has elucidated that staying hungry is not the objective of fasting, rather, it is attainment of Taqwa and if one fasts for the sake of God, one should spend time in God’s remembrance. The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) said at another place that by starvation even hermits gain the capacity for visions, but the objective of the life of a believer is to cut ties with worldly matters and be devoted to God, for which remembrance of God is essential and Salat is the best way for this. When fasting, apart from reduction in food intake, one also abstains from other permissible things and is more focussed about Salat and remembrance of God. If one used to combine Salat or offered it late, particular attention should be given during these days to remembrance of God and worship of God; it should take precedence over everything else.

When we say Alhamdulillah (All praise belongs to Allah), it should not be mere verbal profession. When we recite it, we should be conscious that Hamd (praise of Allah) is for the Great God alone and it reverts to Him alone. We praise that God Who guides those who are lost. If we did not turn to Him during the rest of the year as is His due, then may He guide us in this month so that we are saved from going astray and through the beneficence of Hamd, gain Taqwa. Regarding this, the Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) said that when engaged in Hamd, one should be mindful that all honour is in God’s hand. In this Ramadan we should pray that whatever virtues we do may they give us nearness of God and may we not be drawn to worldly renown and negligence.

The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) said that one should focus on Tasbih (saying SubhanAllah). However, it is not sufficient to simply utter SubhanAllah. When God’s holiness is acknowledged one should be deeply moved to pray for oneself to be freed of all kind of foulness of the world. He then enjoined to say Tahleel. One should worship God in a manner that He alone is worthy of worship. When one is in need of support, one should only seek God’s support. Indeed, man is always in need of God’s support, therefore effort should be made to always turn to the True Beloved.

When fasting we should pray to stay in God's refuge and to partake of the change that God has decreed for those who seek beneficence from fasting, and for this change to grant us beneficence for the rest of our lives. Hamd, Tasbih and Tahleel bring about the condition of 'Tabattalillah' which means to separate oneself for the sake of God from every kind of worldly desire and inculcate perfectly sincere connection with God as well as the condition of 'Inqita', which means to separate oneself from all kinds of worldly amusements and be drawn to the worship of God. This leads to the objective that God has stated as the reason for fasting, that is, a person who is fasting will attain Taqwa. This Ramadan will benefit us only if we keep this in view. This is a great objective and it requires hard work. It requires paying the full dues of worship of God as well as dues of mankind because discharging both these dues in conjunction lead to Taqwa.

We should be mindful, as the episode about our Christian friend illustrates, people of other religions gave up their practices and gave preference to apparent courtesy and gave up the essence of fasting, as it was prescribed to them. Fasting is a form of worship and its objective is to attain Taqwa and pleasure of God which was lost. If reflected over, it is also a kind of Shirk (associating partners with God) to dismiss God's commandment for the sake of one's host. If we give preference to someone over God, we gradually diminish the Being of God and Shirk overtakes. Earlier people forgot the essence of the commandment of fasting and mere pretention remained. Herein is a lesson for Muslims. Those, who instead of understanding the spirit of fasting, aiming for Tabattal, engaging in Hamd and remembrance of God during fasting and observing one's Salat are simply proud of their fast, will have their fasts reduced to the fasts of people of earlier religions.

Some so-called holy people also keep optional fasts in addition of the obligatory fasts but mention them, although optional worship is usually kept private. The Promised Messiah (on whom be peace) has also mentioned such people. If such people have guests, they would offer them food but would excuse themselves from eating or they would visit people at meal times and when the host served food, they would say they could not eat or drink due to some reason. In other words, the objective would be to let others know slyly that they were fasting. Then there are those who unnecessarily mention the length of a fast, as these days duration of fasts is lengthy due to summer time. In order to assert their piety they give details of how little they eat at Sahoor and Iftar. Of course, at times one spontaneously mentions such matters, but there are some who do it deliberately and for effect. In fact there are some so-called religious leaders from among the others (non-Ahmadis) who say that grief for religion has reduced them to eat very little.

A non-Ahmadi friend related an incident of one such so-called religious leader. He was a good orator who especially made fiery speeches against our Jama'at. The non-Ahmadi friend was his follower and once the religious-leader went to stay at his place. A very lavish breakfast was served to the guest who ate three roast chickens. Later, they went to a rally where the religious leader was to make a speech. For effect, he started off by saying that in grief of the Ummah, the servant of religion (him) could not eat a single grain since the morning! The non-Ahmadi friend said he was amazed to hear him say that to his face, from whose house he had just consumed three whole chickens. In any case, the religious leader was right, he had not eaten a grain; he had eaten three chickens. There are such Muslims, whose fasting, which is a worship, is not to seek the pleasure of God but is for pretence whereas God has stated that the objective of every worship should be Taqwa.

If one wants to be rewarded for piety and fasting, it cannot be possible without Taqwa and only God decides who has Taqwa and who does not. If a believer abides by this mind-set and fasts to attain God's pleasure, purification of spirit will take place and such a person will be included among those about whom the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said that whoever fasts during Ramadan in a state of faith while self-examining will have his previous sins forgiven. God has stated that fasting is for Him and He Himself is its reward.

Each one of us should try and fast in this manner and not simply as a customary exercise by simply staying hungry and thirsty. Our fast should be that fast which becomes a shield and saves us from every evil and opens up the door to every good. Our nights should be adorned with optional worship of God. Indeed, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) laid great significance to optional worship during Ramadan and said that one who offers optional Salat during Ramadan has his sins forgiven.

One positive aspect of fasting which is now acknowledged by a section of scientists is that once a year diet-control is beneficial for human health. If the intention is to please God, then the physical benefit takes place and there are many other benefits. When fasting is based on Taqwa it produces a beautiful society creating a spirit of sacrifice for each other. One is drawn to the needs of one's under-privileged brothers and this is very important because it was the blessed model of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) that during Ramadan his alms-giving and charity would gain intense momentum like a wind storm. This becomes a source of removing anxiety from society and creates feelings of empathy for the less fortunate among those who are well-off and feelings of love and gratefulness in the hearts of under-privileged believers for their well-off brothers. When fasting is for the sake of attainment of Taqwa, it inculcates the practice of bearing with hardship. Eating less at Sahoor and Iftar is not for broadcasting to others, but is designed to lessen one's food-intake and be drawn to purification of self/spirit. Therein is lesson for those who may think that eating less may harm their health, they should control their diet.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be on him) enjoined that in situations where there is danger of disturbance or grievances escalating, one should simply say, 'I am fasting'. Therein is indication to ways of Taqwa, that it is also important to control one's emotions. One has to avoid altercations so that the objection of fasting is fulfilled. One has to avoid back-biting so that the objective of fasting is fulfilled, one has to avoid falsehood and dishonesty so that the objective of fasting is fulfilled. The practice to control one's tongue for one month, which is essential for Taqwa, inculcates the habit to avoid many sins and mistakes in future life and one develops a constant habit of abiding by Taqwa and such a habit is indeed the objective of fasting and Ramadan. Otherwise to abide all that God commands in this month and to be wayward and embroiled in sins for the rest of the year does not achieve any objective.

It is needed that everyone self-examines and self-reflects in this month. It is needed to look for the spirit of the month of Ramadan. It is needed to look for ways of Taqwa. It is needed to utilise the experience of giving up permissible things during Ramadan to bring about a general moral change in oneself. It is needed to make constant the practice of paying the dues of mankind and helping underprivileged brothers. It is needed to make constant the special atmosphere of worship of God and sacrifices of Ramadan so that we may work our way towards those who are included among the righteous.

It is needed that we try our utmost to gain nearness to God during this Ramadan. It is God's favour on us that He opens the doors to Paradise and shuts the doors to Hell during this month. We should try through worship of God to attain purification of self/spirit and through paying the dues of mankind to enter the doors of Paradise which may stay open forever. We should repent and engage in Istaghfar (seeking Divine forgiveness) so that we are included among those whose repentance pleases God more than a mother is pleased at finding her lost child. May we give God the happiness of more than a mother's happiness at finding her lost child! However, for this we have to abide by Taqwa and raise the standards of offering our obligatory and optional Prayers and pay attention to paying the dues of mankind. May God out of His sheer grace enable us to attain this during this Ramadan.

Next Hazrat Khalifatul Masih said that after Friday Prayers he would lead some funeral Prayers one of which was funeral Prayer in absentia.

Irfana Shakoor Sahiba passed away after brief illness on 9 July at the age of 62. She was a pious lady who was loved by everyone in her circle. She always counselled her family and friends to stay close to the Jama'at. She was a Moosia. She leaves behind her husband, three daughters and two sons.

Maleeha Anjum passed away on 9 July after a long illness. She was five years old. She was a Waqfe Nau child.

The funeral Prayer in absentia was of Maulwi Abdul Karim Sharma Sahib. He passed away a few weeks ago and his burial has taken place. He was born in 1918 and studied at Jamia Ahmadiyya Qadian. He dedicated his life at the age of 26. He served the Jama'at in numerous capacities. He served in Africa for 29 years and had been in the UK since 1978. He was a member of the Electoral College for Khilafat.

He was a very pious, sincere person. He used to regularly come to see Huzoor when he could walk and was mobile. Later, when he was wheel-chair bound he offered Friday Prayer at Fazl Masjid and would always be present to greet Huzoor as Huzoor left for Baitul Futuh. Love and affection exuded from his face. His grandson has said that Sharma Sahib had great regard and connection with Khilafat. This grandson is a Waqfe Zindagi in Sweden, may God enable him to walk in the footsteps of his maternal grandfather.

May God elevate his station.