

Fourteenth Rule

ABSTAINING FROM FOOD

Scholars have clearly indicated that to fast for the sake of Allah (SWT) is one of the very strong weapons to fight the evil nature within us. Out of the acts of worship, fasting has been lauded a great deal. During Ascension (Me'raj), The Prophet (S) was outlined the beneficial points of starvation, especially its wonderful effect in connection with spiritual journey. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

The believer enjoys hunger. For him, hunger is the food of the heart and the soul.

Allamah Tabai (AR) states,

Hunger illuminates the soul and makes it lighter whereas overeating makes it dull and tired and hampers its soaring to the heaven of Gnosis.

The Prophet has narrated,

Engage yourself in self-struggle (Jihad-e-Nafs) through the means of hunger and thirst, whose reward is equivalent to the reward of those who participated in the armed struggle for Allah's sake. There is nothing more superior before Allah's sight than tolerating hunger and thirst during fasting.

He also said,

The one, who tolerates more hunger as well as ponders deeply about Allah as compared to others, will be assigned higher exalted positions before their Lord on The Day of Judgment.

In addition, he said to Asma,

O' Asma! If you may act in a manner that when The Angel of Death approaches you, he should find you hungry and thirsty. If you do it, you will attain the most exalted spiritual position, will join the ranks of Prophets, will make the Angels happy, and will earn the divine salutations for yourself.

Moreover, he said,

Keep your stomachs hungry and thirsty, and make your bodies used to hardships, perhaps your hearts will then have a chance of seeing Allah's Glory.

In addition, in the narration of Prophet's Heavenly Journey (Me'raj) the following account took place between The Prophet (S) and Allah (SWT),

O' Ahmad! Do you comprehend the outcome of fasting? No. The Prophet (S) replied. The outcome of fasting is less eating and less talking, replied Allah, and then explained the outcome of silence and less speaking as follows,

The result of silence is wisdom; the result of wisdom is enlightenment; the result of enlightenment is certainty; and when a person attains the exalted spiritual position of certainty, then he does not care how he starts his day, whether with ease or hardship, and tragedy or comfort. Such is the state of those who have attained the position of content, and whoever attains this position acquires three inseparable characteristics: thanks not contaminated with ignorance, invocation not mixed with forgetfulness and love not mixed with the love of others.

Whoever loves Me in this manner does not intermingle the love of others with My friendship. I too love him and make others to love him. I would make his heart's eyes opened, so that he could witness My Splendor and Majesty. I would not deprive him from the knowledge and enlightenment bestowed by Me upon others; in the midst of night's darkness as well as during the brightness of the day would whisper and communicate with him, so that he becomes disgusted with other's company. I would have him listen to My speech as well as the speech of My Angels; My secrets, which I keep hidden from others, would become manifested upon him.

I would saturate his wisdom with My Enlightenment and would sit Myself in place of his wisdom; would make the pang of death and its hardships easier for him so that he would enter Paradise with ease and comfort. When The Angel of Death would descend upon him would speak to him: Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! Allah is anxiously waiting for you.

The narration continues - at this point Allah would speak to him,

This is My Paradise, make yourself at home, and this is My Neighborhood in which you would be dwelling forever.

Then the soul would say,

O' my Lord! You have introduced Yourself to me and after identifying You, I became detached with Your entire creation. By Your Splendor and Majesty I swear that in order to earn Your pleasure if I have to be slaughtered seventy times with extreme suffering and torture, even then Your consent would have been the most dearest and desirable thing for me.

At this point Allah would speak to him,

I swear with My Splendor and Majesty that from now on there will never be any veil between you and Me that you may see Me whenever you desire so. That is the way I treat my friends.

According to Haj Mirza Javad Agha Maliki Tabrizi (AR), the effects of less eating is,

Purity of heart and insight, because, over-eating and fullness creates a state similar to drunkenness within a human being which slows down his sense of perception, reducing his power of quick grasping, thus, ultimately resulting in his heart's blindness.

Humility, hospitality, self-breaking, earthiness, and freedom from arrogance, egotism, and haughtiness, because these are the by-products of transgression, rebellion, and ill servitude towards Allah (The Glorious, The Exalted).

Lowering of intensity of sensual passions and other such motivations, which invite a human being towards sinning and other deviations.

Less sleeping - we know that oversleeping is one of the most important factors of wasting of our age, which is the precious sum at our disposal for the affairs of Hereafter. But hunger reduces sleep, thus, providing opportunities for night vigil, the source of all blessings and bounties, and helps a human being in worshipping and supplications which is the ladder for his attaining the most desirable spiritual station.

Ease of worshipping rather servitude, because, the one who is used to less eating will save a lot of time which otherwise must have been spent for making arrangements, purchasing, cooking, consuming, and relieving, as well as time spent for medical treatment, since in many cases the sickness is the cause of over-eating.

Financial ability of a person to spend for charity, benevolence, pilgrimage, and other acts of worship which require expenses, because, a lot of expenses spent only for providing unnecessary food items or for medical treatment as a result of over-eating, could be utilized for the above-mentioned worships.

One of Shaykh Rajab Ali's devotees relates about him that the Shaykh was once holding a session in a house of his friend. Before starting his talk, he felt somehow weak due to hunger and asked for some bread. The householder brought him half a loaf of bread for him to eat, and then he started the meeting. The following night he said,

Last night I made salutations to The Holy Imams (AS) but I did not see them. I pleaded to find the reason. I was told intuitively: You had half of that food and the hunger alleviated. Why then did you eat the other half?

Having some food, enough for body's need is all right, but extra to that would cause veil and darkness.

There was once a person who was in great misfortune. He had nothing to eat and neither did someone invite him on that difficult day. He thus decided to visit one of the houses of Allah (SWT) (i.e. a mosque) and declare his poverty in front of his Lord. It is reported that he passed the whole night in hunger and his invocation was never answered. The next day The Prophet (S) was informed of the situation. He (S), at that very moment, was blessed with a revelation from The Almighty that,

Tell Our guest that We were his Host last night and wanted to provide him with sumptuous food but found no better food than hunger!

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) was true in saying,

The believer enjoys hunger. For him hunger is the food of the heart and the soul.

There is a tradition by Imam Ali (AS) that on The Night of Me'raj, Allah (SWT) said to The Prophet (S),

'O' Ahmad (S)! How sweet and beautiful are the hunger, silence and seclusion. Wisdom, heart's tranquility, nearness to Me, continuous grief, righteous talks, thriftiness, and indifference at the time of ease, and hardships, are the characteristics acquired by My servant because of hunger, silence, and seclusion.

It is clear that fasting has in itself a great many benefits, and one of the most important is Self-control. We learn how to regulate ourselves with our life so that we may be able to exert control and not let ourselves be lured into disobedience by Shaytan. It also makes us humble and makes us completely surrender to The Will of The Almighty Allah (SWT). It is considered as the best form of exercise and diet for our body. Truly, when we fast for Allah (SWT) the whole day and abstain from everything that one consumes on other days, Allah (SWT) prepares Himself to listen to our complaints and invocations when we open our fasts. However, we need to fast with our eyes and ears in order to reap the fruits set by The Almighty for only those who fast for Him and Him only. However, it is recommended on the condition that it should not disturb mental peace and composure.

Regarding fasting, and the conditions Imam al-Sadiq (AS) considers essential for the authenticity of fasting, some of them would be described here as follows,

The fast observer should consider himself as Hereafter's traveler, should remain in the state of humility, fear, self-degradation, and like a servant fearing his master, and should remain afraid of Allah.

His heart should remain pure from defects and contamination, and his inner-self should be free from everything except Allah. He must sacrifice his entire friendship and intentions for Him and must purify his heart from all other friendships except that of Allah. He must surrender his eyes and soul to Him; must commit his soul for His remembrance; must utilize his body in Allah's path and must keep it distant apart especially the tongue from all sorts of sins and indecencies. Whoever has observed these limitations had indeed discharged his obligations of fasting properly, and whoever has shown negligence to discharge these obligations has wasted his fast and would not benefit from its reward.

In Islam, the spiritual, social, economic, political and psychological benefits of fast are interrelated, each affecting the other. Rituals regulate The Muslims' social and individual life and bring them closer to their Creator. A combination of fast, prayers, and meditation may be the very best dose for any and all psychological, financial, and spiritual ills from which one may be suffering. They purify the soul, cleanse the intention, and bring about an abundance of good from The Almighty Who is Ever-Watching over us and Who desires nothing but good for His sincere servants.

Scholars have said,

Specifically during The Month of Ramadan, we learn to curb our desires and check them against transgression, extravagance, and the yielding to the lower desires, all of which degenerate man and bring him to the pit of self-destruction and annihilation. Fast fosters a strong will, teaches patience and self-discipline, the ability to bear hardship and tolerate hunger and thirst. In short, it brings about a clear victory over one's illicit desires and selfish impulses. It regulates and systemizes the energies of instincts. It trains the body to submit to lofty spiritual impulses. It safeguards the body's health by protecting it against extravagance. It grants its organs a respite so that they may be ready to resume their activities.

As medical science has proved, fasting is medicine for many bodily and nervous ailments. It is a moral education, a nourishment of supreme virtues. It teaches the believer to abandon vices, to control emotions and instincts, to curb the tongue against saying what is wrong or inappropriate and the conscience against contemplating upon wrongdoing or subversion. It promotes the spirit of unity among members of the fasting community; it teaches them humility and humbleness and instills within them the feeling of equality before Allah (SWT), the Almighty.

The rich have to observe it as well as the poor, the women as well as the men, the influential and powerful as well as the weak and downtrodden; they all have to observe the fast. It promotes the spirit of charity and compassion towards the poor and the needy, and it reminds each believer of the needs of other believers. Muslims share with each other Allah (SWT)'s blessings unto them. The believers strengthen their ties with The Almighty, since they express through fast a continuous desire to obey His Will and carry out His Commandments. They also strengthen their ties with one another, since The Month of Ramadan is the month of giving. It is the month for productive social interactivity. Islam places a great deal of emphasis on moral excellence during this holy month. The Prophet of Islam (S) has said,

One who, while fasting, neither guards his tongue from telling lies nor refrains from doing bad deeds does not respect his fast, while Allah (SWT) does not approve of mere abstention from food ... When you fast, you should not speak ill of anybody, nor should you be boisterous or noisy. If anybody speaks ill of you or tries to pick a quarrel with you, do not respond to him in the same manner; rather, simply tell him that you are fasting.

The institute of fast is one of the signs of The Almighty's Mercy on those who adhere to His Divine Creed, and it is never meant to put a hardship on anybody. The Almighty does not gain any benefit from putting hardship on anyone. On the contrary, He always tries to pave the way of happiness for His servants in this life and the life to come, and sometimes He even 'pushes' them to do what is good for them, as is the case with making the fast of the month of Ramadan obligatory on every believing man and woman. Nevertheless, if you afford this great month a sincere and profound welcome, you will receive your rewards in many, many ways both in the short life of this fleeting world and in the eternal abode, Insha-Allah (SWT).

Allah (SWT) has said,

For all righteous deeds of servants there is a reward from ten times to seven hundred times, but since fasting is specifically reserved for me, I will bestow its reward.

Fasting in the month of Ramadhan deserves some more attention. On page 64, vol. 2, of Safeenat al-Bihar, The Messenger of Allah (S) says that Allah (SWT) Almighty has charged a group of His Angels with the task of supplicating for those who observe the fast. On the same page of the same reference, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says that if a person fasts during a hot day, and he suffers from thirst, Allah (SWT) will assign a thousand Angels to wipe his face and convey to him glad tidings. Moreover, when he breaks his fast, Allah (SWT), The Most Exalted, The Most Glorified, addresses him with these words,

How sweet your smell and soul are! O' My Angels! Bear witness that I have forgiven him.

On page 96 of *Thawab al-A'mal Wa Iqab al- A'mal*, and also on page 48 of his book *al-Amali* (or page 29-32 of old editions), Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Babawayh al-Qummi al-Saduq (306-381 A.H.) quotes Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim al-Ma'athi saying that Ahmed ibn Jaylawayh al-Jurjani al- Muthakkar quotes Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Bilal quoting Abu Muhammad quoting Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Kiram quoting Ahmed ibn Abdullah quoting Sufyan ibn 'Ayeenah quoting Mu'awiya ibn Abu Ishaq quoting Sa'eed ibn Jubayr saying,

I asked Ibn Abbas once about the reward of one who fasts during The Month of Ramadan knowing its greatness. He said,

O' Son of Jubayr! Get ready to listen to what your ears have never heard before, nor your heart has ever experienced, nor has your soul ever reckoned regarding that about which you have inquired! What you are seeking is the knowledge of the first generations and the last!

Therefore, I left him and prepared myself to meet him again. I returned to him at early daybreak. Having said the morning prayers (together), I reminded him of the tradition, which I had sought, so he turned his face to me and said, listen carefully to what I am going to tell you. I have heard The Messenger of Allah (S) saying,

Had you ever come to know about your rewards during The Month of Ramadan, you would surely have thanked The Almighty a great deal more (than you usually do). When the first night is over, Allah (SWT), The Almighty and The Exalted One, forgives the sins committed by all members of my nation, the ones committed in secrecy and the ones committed in public, and He elevates your status two thousand degrees and builds you fifty towns in Paradise.

On the next day, He rewards you for every step you take during that day with the rewards of one who adored Him for a full year and the reward of one of His Prophets, and He will reward you as though you had performed the fast for a full year.

On the third day, The Exalted and Dear One grants you a Dome in Paradise for each hair on your body, a Dome of a white pearl on top of which are twelve thousand light houses and at the bottom of which are twelve thousand houses in each one of which there are one thousand beds and on each bed of which there is a Heavenly Lady with large lovely eyes, each served by one thousand servants the head-covering of each one of them is better than this world and everything in it.

On the fifth day, He builds you in Paradise a million cities in each one of which there are seventy thousand houses, inside each one of which there are seventy thousand tables, and on each table there are seventy thousand bowls, and in each bowl there are sixty thousand types of food each one of which is different from the other.

On the sixth day, He will grant you in The Abode of Peace a hundred thousand towns in each one of which there are a hundred thousand rooms, in each room there are a hundred thousand beds of gold the length of each is a thousand yards, and on each bed is a Heavenly Lady with large lovely eyes whose hair has thirty thousand locks braided with pearls and sapphires, and each lock is carried by a hundred concubines.

On the seventh day, The Almighty grants you in The Garden of Bliss the rewards of forty thousand martyrs and forty thousand pious men (amongst the truthful).

On the eighth day, Allah Almighty grants you the rewards of the good deeds of sixty thousand worshippers and sixty thousand ascetics.

On the ninth day, Allah, The Exalted One, gives you what is equal to what He gives a thousand scholars and a thousand devotees and a thousand warriors fighting for Allah in a foreign land.

On the tenth day, He gives you the fulfillment of seventy thousand of your worldly wishes and orders the sun, the moon, the stars, the animals, the birds, the beasts, every rock and every rain-drop, everything wet and everything dry, all fish in the oceans and all leaves on the trees, to pray for your forgiveness.

On the eleventh day, The Exalted and Mighty One grants you the rewards whereby He rewards one who performs the pilgrimage and umrah four times and one who performs the pilgrimage with His Prophets and the umrah with every Truthful or Martyr.

On the twelfth day, He takes upon Himself to replace your sins with good deeds, and then He multiplies your good deeds many times and gives you the rewards of each of your good deeds a million times.

On the thirteenth day, Allah (SWT) Almighty grants you what He grants the devotees of Makkah and Madinah and bestows upon you an intercession for each stone and raindrop between Makkah and Madinah.

On the fourteenth day, He treats you as though you had met and followed in the footsteps of Prophet Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Daud and Prophet Suleiman (peace be on all of them), and as though you had worshipped The Almighty Allah (SWT) in the company of His Prophets for two hundred years.

On the fifteenth day, He fulfills ten of your worldly wishes and those of The Hereafter and grants you what He granted Prophet Ayub (AS). Then He orders The Angels who bear The 'Throne' to pray for your forgiveness and grants you on the Day of Resurrection 40 lights: ten on your right, ten on your left, ten before you and ten behind you.

On the sixteenth day, The Almighty grants you sixty outfits to wear as soon as you abandon your grave and a she-camel to ride, and He will send a cloud to overshadow you to protect you from the heat of that Day.

On the seventeenth day, The Almighty Allah (SWT) says, 'I have forgiven them and their parents and exempted them from having to undergo the hardships of The Day of Resurrection.'

On the eighteenth day, The Praised and Exalted One orders Archangel Jibraeel, Mikaeel and Israfeel (Peace be on all of them) as well as The Angels who bear The 'Throne' and all Archangels to seek forgiveness for the nation of Prophet Muhammad (S) till the next year, and He will also grant you on The Day of Resurrection whatever rewards He grants to those who participated in the Battle of Badr.

On the nineteenth day, all Angels in The Heavens and on Earth will have already sought permission of their Lord to visit your graves and to bring you every day a present and a drink (as long as you remain in the Barzakh).

Therefore, if you complete your fast for twenty full days, Te Almighty Allah (SWT) sends you seventy thousand angels to protect you from every accursed devil. He will have granted you for each day of your fast your rewards as though you fasted a hundred years. He will set a ditch between you and Hell and grant you the rewards of all those who recited The Torah, The Gospel, The Psalms and The Holy Qur'an, and will write for you for each feather on Jibraeel the reward of a full year and will grant you the rewards of those who glorify Him at The 'Throne' and 'Chair' and will marry you to a thousand nymphs for each of the verses of The Qur'an.

On the twenty-first day, The Almighty expands your grave a thousand parasangs and lifts the darkness and loneliness of your graves and makes your graves look like the graves of the martyrs and your faces like the face of Prophet Yusuf (AS) son of Prophet Ya'qub (AS).

On the twenty-second day, The Almighty dispatches The Angel of Death as He dispatches him to His Prophets to remove your worldly worries and the torment of The Hereafter.

On the twenty-third day, you will pass on The Straight Path in the company of The Prophets, the first to follow The Prophets, and the martyrs, as if you had fed each orphan and clothed everyone who needed to be clothed.

On the twenty-fourth day, you will not leave this life before each one of you sees the place reserved for him or her in Paradise and is given the rewards of a thousand sick and a thousand who go back to their creed and will grant you the rewards of one who freed a thousand captives from the descendants of Prophet Ismael (AS).

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On the twenty-fifth day, Allah (SWT) will have built you under His 'Throne' a thousand green domes on top of each one of which is a tent of light. The Almighty and Exalted One will then say,

'O' Followers of Muhammad! I am your Lord and you are My servants! Enjoy the shade of My Throne in these domes, eat, and drink with enjoyment, for there will be no fear on you, nor will you grieve. O' Nation of Muhammad! By My Dignity and Greatness! I shall dispatch you to Paradise in a way, which will amaze the first generations and the last. I shall crown each one of you with a thousand light crowns. I shall provide for each one of you a she camel whose reins are made of light, and in it are a thousand gold rings, in each is an Angel looking after it, in the hand of each Angel is a light rod so that he may enter Paradise without a reckoning.'

In addition, on the twenty-sixth day, Allah (SWT) will look at you with compassion and will forgive all your sins except those of shedding innocent blood or robbing people's wealth, and He will grant you every day a thousand barriers against backbiting, lying and slandering.

On the twenty-seventh day, He will consider you as though you had aided every believing man and woman and clothed seventy thousand naked persons and equipped a thousand soldiers to camp in a foreign land to defend Islam, and as if you have recited every book, Allah (SWT) has revealed to His prophets.

On the twenty-eighth day, Allah (SWT) will have built you in Paradise a hundred thousand light cities and granted you in the garden of bliss a hundred thousand silver mansions and a hundred thousand cities in each one of which there are a thousand rooms, and granted you in the garden of greatness a hundred thousand pulpits of musk inside each one of which there is a thousand saffron houses in each one of which there are a thousand beds of pearls and sapphires and on each bed a wife of the Heavenly Ladies with large lovely eyes.

So if you complete your fast till the twenty-ninth day, The Almighty Allah (SWT) will grant you a million quarters, inside each quarter is a white dome underneath which is a white camphor bed on which there are a thousand mattresses of green silk on each one of which there is a Heavenly Lady decorated with seventy thousand ornaments and crowned with eighty thousand locks each one of which is decorated with diamonds and sapphires.

So if you finish thirty complete days of fast, The Almighty will have granted you for each day the rewards of a thousand martyrs and a thousand foremost believers in His Prophets, and He will have assigned for you the rewards of fifty years of adoration, and He will have decreed a clearance for you from Hell and a passage on The Straight Path and a security against the torment. One of The Gates of Paradise is al-Rayyan, and it shall never be opened before The Day of Resurrection. It will be opened for those among the nation of Prophet Muhammad (S) who performed the fast. Ridhwan, custodian of Paradise, will call out saying:

'O Followers of Muhammad! Come to The al-Rayyan Gate!'

Therefore, he will let my nation enter Paradise through that gate. Therefore, if one is not forgiven during The Month of Ramadan, in which month can he be forgiven? There is neither will nor strength except from Allah (SWT); Allah (SWT) suffices us, and what a great Helper He is!

This lengthy tradition is also recorded on pp. 183-185, Vol. 8, of Bihar al-Anwar.

Why all this related to fasting? Imam Sadiq (AS) explains, as fasting related to spiritual growth,

Fasting does not mean only renunciation of eating and drinking, rather it has conditions, which must be followed strictly in order to have a complete and perfect fast, which means internal silence. Did you not hear the reply of Janab Maryam (AS), daughter of Imran, who said to her people, 'I have vowed a fast for Allah (SWT), therefore, today I will speak to none, i.e. I am fasting, therefore I must be quiet.'

So when you observe fast protect your tongue from lying; don't be angry; don't curse; don't be rude; don't argue and dispute; don't reject or be indecent to each other due to ignorance; don't be negligent from Allah (SWT)'s remembrance; continually practice silence, intellection, patience and keep distance from the wicked people.

Assign importance to The Hereafter; must look forward for The Day when God's Promise will be fulfilled, and collect some provisions for God's countenance.

One should practice poise, dignity, humbleness, humility, and fear like a servant who is afraid of his Master; he should remain in the state of hope and fear...

In the same vein, with regards to our attention towards The Almighty, Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

When you leave your home, do it as if you will never return. Leave only for the sake of obedience to Allah (SWT) or for the sake of the faith. Remain tranquil and dignified in your bearing, and remember Allah (SWT) both secretly and openly.