

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

Today, we are on the tenth day of fasting here in Mauritius. We have about 20 more days left. Let us all be thankful that Allah has been very benignant to us as He usually is by helping us to fast except for those who are sick or cannot fast due to old age or due to any other allowable causes that prohibit fasting. If we can compare this one-month fasting to a marathon, we can say that we have completed at least one third of the journey and we still have two thirds to go. Let us hope and pray that Allah helps each one amongst us who is fasting to complete the fast with ease and that He may accept them from us. Some might feel the lack of food and drink more severely in the days ahead. If that becomes the case, pray to Allah and ask Him to help you to fast and help you not to feel the pangs of hunger too much. It helps a lot when we solicit Allah's help in trying to do good deeds.

Now, I will finish the reading of the booklet by Imam Ghazzali (ra) about the inner dimensions of fasting. This last part is subtitled "LOOK TO GOD WITH FEAR AND HOPE." So, he continued:

"After the Fast has been broken, the heart should swing like a pendulum between fear and hope. For one does not know if one's Fast will be accepted, so that one will find favour with God, or whether it will be rejected, leaving one among those He abhors. This is how one should be at the end of any act of worship one performs. It is related of al-Ḥasan ibn Abīl Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (known as one of the first Sufis if not the first) that he once passed by a group of people who were laughing merrily. He said:

'God, Great and Glorious is He, has made the month of Ramaḍān a racecourse, on which His creatures compete in His worship. Some have come in first and won, while others have lagged behind and lost. It is absolutely amazing to find anybody laughing and playing about on the day when success attends the victors, and failure the wastrels. By God, if the veil were lifted, the doer of good would surely be preoccupied with his good works and the evildoer with his evil deeds.'

In other words, the man whose Fast has been accepted will be too full of joy to indulge in idle sport, while for one who has suffered rejection laughter will be precluded by remorse.

Of al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays it is reported that he was once told: 'You are an aged elder; Fasting would enfeeble you.' But he replied: 'By this I am making ready for a long journey. Obedience to God, Gloried is He, is easier to endure than His punishment.' Such are the inwardly significant meanings of Fasting.

Now you may say: ‘Suppose someone confines himself to curbing his appetite for food and drink and his sexual desire, to the neglect of these inward aspects. According to the experts in jurisprudence his Fast is valid. So, what are we to make of this?’ You must realise that those versed in the external requirements of the law base their formal stipulations on evidence less cogent than the proofs we have advanced in support of these internal prerequisites, especially those relating to backbiting and the like.

However, scholars of external legality are concerned only with such obligations as fall within the capacity of ordinary heedless people, wholly caught up in the affairs of this world. As for those learned in knowledge of the Hereafter, the meaning they attach to validity is acceptance, and by acceptance they mean attainment of the goal. According to their understanding, the goal of Fasting is the acquisition of one of the qualities of God, Great and Glorious is He, namely steadfastness (*ṣamadīya*), as well as following the example of the angels by abstaining as far as possible from the desires of the flesh, for they are immune to such passions. The human status is superior to that of the animals, since man is able by the light of reason to tame his lust; yet it is inferior to that of the angels, in that he is subject to carnality and put to the test in combat with its temptations. Whenever man falls prey to lust, he sinks to the lowest of the low and joins the animal herd. Whenever he curbs his desires, he ascends to the highest of the high and attains the angelic level. The angels are near the presence of God, Great and Glorious is He, so those who follow their example and model themselves on their character will likewise draw near to God, Great and Glorious is He. To resemble one who is near is to be near. This nearness, however, is not spatial but qualitative. If this is the secret of Fasting among men of profound spiritual understanding, what benefit is to be derived from postponing a meal only to combine two meals after sunset, while indulging in all other passions the whole day long? If there were any good in such conduct, what could the Prophet, on him be peace, have meant by saying: ‘How many of those who Fast get nothing from it but hunger and thirst?’

This is why Abūl Dardā’ said: ‘How fine is the sleep of the wise and their non-Fasting! Don’t they just put to shame the Fasting and wakefulness of fools! A mere atom from those possessed of certainty and true piety is better and weightier than seeming mountains of worship by the misguided.’

For the same reason one of the scholars said: ‘How many who Fast are not keeping Fast, and how many who do not keep Fast are Fasting!’ The Fasting non-Faster is he who keeps his limbs and organs pure of sin while still eating and drinking; the non-Fasting Faster is he who goes hungry and thirsty while giving full license to his limbs and organs. Those who understand the significance of Fasting and its secret meaning are aware that he who abstains from food, drink and sexual intercourse, while breaking Fast by involving himself in sin, is like one who performs his ablution by wiping part of his body three times (in compliance with the external legal requirement), yet neglects what is really important, namely the actual washing. Because of this stupidity

his ritual Prayer is rejected. By contrast, he who does not abstain from eating, yet does Fast in the sense of keeping his organs free from all that is unworthy, is comparable to one who washes the proper parts of his body only once each. God willing, his ritual Prayer is acceptable, since he has paid due attention to the essentials, even if he has omitted the details. But he who combines the two may be compared to one who not only washes each part of the body, but does so three times each, for he attends to essentials and details alike, and this constitutes perfection. The Prophet, on him be peace, once said: ‘The Fast is a trust, so let each of you keep this trust!’

And when he recited the words of God, Great and Glorious is He: ‘Surely God bids you restore trusts to their owners.’ [al-Nisā’, 4:58] he touched his ears and his eyes, saying: ‘Hearing is a trust and sight is a trust.’ If speech were not likewise a trust of the Fast, the Prophet, on him be peace, would not have said: ‘Say: “I am Fasting!”’ In other words: ‘My tongue has been entrusted to my care, so how can I release it to answer your insults?’ It therefore becomes apparent that every act of worship has both an outer and an inner aspect, a husk and a kernel.”

So, if we are trying our best to walk the path of God as good Muslims and as we have declared in our *bay’at*, it is incumbent upon us all to do our best not just to stay without food and drink but to fast in taking into consideration its inner dimension. In fact, its main purpose is to develop *taqwa* as Allah has said in the Holy Quran:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become righteous (2:183)

When we fast, we are in fact exercising our spirit to be more conscious of Allah in our life. We do not fast to diet or to cultivate a slim physique. We fast to curb our lawful appetites in order to develop within ourselves moral qualities of control and not easily giving in to them voraciously. Allah is our Lord. He has created us and He knows what we desire most and what are our natural tendencies. To control their manifestations, Allah has prescribed for us to undergo a regimen of one month by curbing our need for food, drink and sex at least during the time of fasting. And in addition to that, as per the instructions of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (saw), we should not indulge in useless talking, backbiting, and if someone tries to fight, we are expected to tell him that we are fasting as has been explained in this booklet that we have read. That does not mean at all that we should be idling away our time. We are expected to read and understand and reflect upon the Holy Quran to deepen our understanding of what Allah expects from us as Muslims. In addition, we are expected to engage in greater remembrance of Allah than in other days of the week. Hence, we should do our best to read Nawafil with a view to get closer to Allah. Furthermore, we are also expected to spend our money on charity for those poor people who are in difficulty especially these days of pandemic. In brief, this *taqwa* that we are expected to develop within us during

the month of Ramadan should be the state of mind that we should try to live by during the other months of the year. The things that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) specifically forbid us to do in Ramadan are unlawful actions even outside Ramadan. So, during Ramadan, we exercise ourselves in staying far away from what is forbidden. That is what we are expected to do outside Ramadan. It is only then that what we have practiced in Ramadan will stay with us and help us to become better Muslims who live in full consciousness of Allah's Presence wherever they are. May Allah help each one amongst us to become such Muslims and may Allah help us develop such an awareness of Him that stays with us forever incha Allah. Ameen.