

Removal of difficulties of fasting

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 22 April 2022

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ۖ وَمَنْ كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ ۗ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٢١٨﴾

“The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to people and clear proofs of guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast in it, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for having guided you and that you may give thanks.” — ch. 2, v. 185

I ended the last *khutba* on this subject by pointing out that the Holy Quran does not mention the application of any punishment for deliberately breaking the fast. Hadith only shows that it is sufficient that the violator should be sincerely repentant. In this connection there is an interesting hadith in Bukhari as follows:

Abu Hurairah said: We were sitting with the Prophet ﷺ, when a man came and said: “O Messenger of Allah! I am ruined.” He asked: “What has happened to you?” He said: “I had sexual relations with my wife while I was fasting.”

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Can you afford to (buy and) set a slave free?” He said: “No.” He said: “Can you fast for two successive months?” He said: “No.” He said: “Can you afford to feed sixty needy poor people?” He said: “No.”

Abu Hurairah added: The Prophet ﷺ kept quiet for a while. We were still like that when a bag containing dates was brought to him. He (the Holy Prophet) said: “Where is the questioner?” He said: “I am here.” He said: “Take this and

give it in charity.” The man asked: “O Messenger of Allah! Should I give it to someone poorer than me? By Allah! There is no family between the two stony ends (of Madinah) poorer than my family.” The Prophet ﷺ laughed until his teeth showed and then said: “Feed your family with it.” (hadith 1936)

Maulana Muhammad Ali comments on this as follows: “What great mercy is there in the teachings of the Holy Prophet! No doubt, his teachings impose hardships and difficulties by requiring prayer and fasting. Moreover, for infringing a rule of fasting a penalty has to be imposed. However, if a person acknowledges that he has disobeyed some commandment of Allah, and is sincerely repentant, this incident shows how great the sympathy and mercy is with which he is treated. This clearly shows that the real purpose was to inculcate the spirit to abide by the Divine commandments, and it was not to impose difficulty and hardship.”

This, of course, is in line with the words from the verse I quoted at the beginning: “Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you”. In this incident at every step he Holy Prophet made things easier for the man.

Reverting to the verse I quoted at the beginning, the month of Ramadan has been chosen for fasting because it is the month in which the Quran was revealed. It is well-known that the Quran was revealed in portions *during a period of twenty-three years*; therefore, by its revelation in the month of Ramadan is meant that the revelation *first took place* in that month in a certain year. I also pointed out in an earlier *khutba* that it is stated in Hadith that the angel Gabriel (*Jibrīl*) every Ramadan came to the Holy Prophet and read with him the whole of the Quran as it was at that time. So this statement that “The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed” may refer to that as well.

The first revelation came to the Holy Prophet when he was 40 years old during one of the nights towards the end of the month of Ramadan when he was in the cave of Hira. As the Quran says: *إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ* — “Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty” (ch. 97, v. 1). According to reports in Hadith, this was a night in the last ten

nights of Ramadan (Bukhari, hadith 2020). Of course, fasting in Ramadan for Muslims, as we practise it, was only prescribed several years later after the migration to Madinah, and it was in commemoration of the revelation of the Quran. The greatest spiritual experience of the Holy Prophet had taken place in that month. So it was considered to be the most suitable month of the year for the spiritual discipline of the Muslim community through fasting.

If a particular time had not been specified, the discipline would have lost all its value. Because of choosing a fixed month, when that month begins the whole Muslim world, from one end of the earth to the other, has the same experience. All sections of Muslim society suddenly change the course of their lives when Ramadan begins. If the basics had been left up to the individual to decide, such as on which days to fast, or what to give up during fasting, then it would not be a community institution which brings people together. Moreover, individuals themselves would lose the motivation to fast. Yes, it is true that a person is more likely to do something if he or she sees others doing it. That natural human behaviour can be put to good, productive use. Just like everything else in life, this behaviour of following other people can do harm in the wrong circumstances.

People who are exempted from fasting are specially mentioned either in the Holy Quran or in the Hadith. The Quran mentions the sick and those on journey in the above verse, and says that they must complete any missed fasts. The verse before this says the same but it has an addition. It says:

“But whoever among you is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. And those who find it extremely hard (*yuṭīqūna*) may effect redemption (*fidyah*) by feeding a poor one...” ch. 2, v. 184.

Many interpreters of the Quran take *yuṭīqūna*, which we have translated as “who find it extremely hard”, as meaning “those who are able to do it”, and many of them claim that when this verse, 184, was revealed, it was at an early stage in the beginning of fasting in Islam, and at that initial stage fasting was made a matter of choice so that

anyone who was able to feed a poor person could do that instead of fasting. They claim that the next verse, 185, instituted the fasting in Ramadan that we know today, and that it abrogated this earlier-offered choice and made fasting obligatory for everyone, except those who are sick or on a journey. But instead of bringing in abrogation, and treating a statement in the Quran as no longer operative, Maulana Muhammad Ali says that the redemption or *fidyah* by feeding a poor one applies to those who are unable to fast at all, who can neither fast in Ramadan nor are they able to make up for the missed fasts after Ramadan. Thus there is nothing abrogated.

So the sick person and the traveller who misses any fasts in Ramadan is required to fast afterwards, when the sickness has gone or when the journey ends, and to complete the missed fasts after Ramadan. Those who have a long-term illness are allowed to effect a redemption by feeding one poor person for every fast missed. According to Hadith, old people, pregnant women, and women suckling a child, are exempt from fasting and should feed a poor person instead (Bukhari, heading to hadith 4505). Those who cannot afford to feed a poor person can perform some other act of charity, such as helping someone in need in some other way. People engaged in hard manual labour may postpone fasting to a time of the year when it is possible for them to fast.

There can be no precise and exact definition of sickness or journey. It is a matter to be determined by the person himself. As regards being on a journey, the Holy Prophet was once questioned by a person whether he should or should not stop fasting when on a journey. He was someone who kept a lot of fasts. The Holy Prophet replied: “If you wish you can fast and if you wish can break it” (Bukhari, hadith 1942–1943).

When people travelled with the Holy Prophet, those who kept the fast did not find fault with those who broke it, nor did those who broke the fast find fault with those who kept it. There is a saying of the Holy Prophet: “It is not a virtuous act to fast on a journey” (Bukhari, hadith 1946). But he said this to a man who was in severe distress because of his fast, and people had gathered around him to provide shade for him from the heat. In Sahih Muslim there is a hadith as follows:

“The Messenger of Allah went out towards Makkah in the year of the conquest of Makkah in Ramadan. He fasted till he reached Kurā’-ul-Ghamīm, and the people also fasted. It was said to him: People are finding the fasting unbearable and are waiting to see what you do. So he called for a cup of water, and he held it high till people saw it, and then he drank. This was at the time of ‘*Aṣr*. He was later informed that some people had continued to fast. He said: These are the disobedient ones, these are the disobedient ones.” (Sahih Muslim, Book of Fasting, ch. 15, hadith 1116)

We see here that the Holy Prophet, during a journey in Ramadan, broke the fast at the time of the ‘*Aṣr* prayer for people’s convenience, and demonstrated it in front of them, and ordered them to do the same. As this was on a journey, the fast was a matter of choice, even during Ramadan.

Contrast the Holy Prophet’s open action with the behaviour of today’s religious leaders. We see examples where they take the comfortable path themselves but deny the same to their followers, and make them suffer hardship.

May Allah enable us to complete the fasts during this Ramadan, and to do so in the true sense and spirit of refraining from wrong-doing, remembering and thanking Allah and doing good to others, especially the needy. Ameen.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-
