XVII. THE FAST

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English

XVII. THE FAST

1. **Fasting — Spiritual in Character**

"The fasting period, which lasts nineteen days starting as a rule from the second of March every year and ending on the twentieth of the same month, involves complete abstention from food and drink from sunrise till sunset. It is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. Its significance and purpose are, therefore, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, January 10, 1936)

1. **Observance of the Fast is a Universal Obligation — Bahá'u'lláh Permits Certain Exceptions to Fasting**

"Regarding the nineteen-day fast: Its observance has been enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh upon all the believers, once they attain the age of fifteen and until they reach seventy. Children of all countries, nationalities and classes who are fifteen years old are under this obligation. It matters not whether they mature later in one country than in another. The command of Bahá'u'lláh is universal, irrespective of any variance in the age of maturity in different countries and among different peoples."

"In the 'Aqdas' Bahá'u'lláh permits certain exceptions to this general obligation of fasting, among them are included those who do hard work, such as workers in heavy industries."

"But while a universal obligation, the observance of the nineteen day fast has been made by Bahá'u'lláh the sole responsibility of the individual believer. No Assembly has the right to enforce it on the friends, or to hold anybody responsible for not observing it. The believer is free, however, to ask the advice of his Assembly as to the circumstances that would justify him to conscientiously break such a fast. But he is by no means required to do so."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 9, 1937)

1. **Fasting has a Salutary Effect Both Physically and Spiritually**

"Keeping the Fast is enjoined upon all Bahá'ís, regardless of nationality; it has a very salutary effect both physically and spiritually, and the friends should realize Bahá'u'lláh never would have instituted it if it were detrimental to the health."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 21, 1946)

1. **The Doctor's Advice Should Be Sought if There is a Health Problem**

"As to your question regarding the Fast: If there is any doubt in the mind of a person as to whether it will really be bad for that person's health to keep it, the best doctor's advice should be obtained. But generally speaking most people can [pg 235] keep it, anywhere in the world, with no detriment to their health. It is very good for the health and, once one forms the habit, each year it becomes easier to keep, unless one is rundown. No one is obliged to keep it if it really harms them."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 14, 1947)

1. **The Divine Wisdom in Fasting**

"The Divine wisdom in fasting is manifold. Among them is this: As during those days (i.e., the period of fasting which the followers afterward observe) the Manifestation of the Sun of Reality, through Divine inspiration, is engaged in the descent (revealing) of Verses, the instituting of Divine Law and the arrangement of teachings, through excessive occupation and intensive attraction there remains no condition or time for eating and drinking. For example, when His Holiness Moses went to Mount Tur (Sinai) and there engaged in instituting the Law of God, He fasted forty days. For the purpose of awakening and admonishing the people of Israel, fasting was enjoined upon them."

"Likewise, His Holiness Christ, in the beginning of instituting the Spiritual Law, the systematizing of the teachings and the arrangement of counsels, for forty days abstained from eating and drinking. In the beginning the disciples and Christians fasted. Later the assemblages of the chief Christians changed fasting into lenten observances."

"Likewise the Koran having descended in the month of Ramazan, fasting during that month became a duty."

"In like manner His Holiness the Supreme (the Bab), in the beginning of the Manifestation through the excessive effect of descending verses, passed days in which His nourishment was reduced to tea only."

"Likewise, the Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh), when busy with instituting the Divine Teachings and during the days when the Verses (The Word of God) descended continuously, through the great effect of the Verses and the throbbing of the heart, took no food except the least amount."

"The purpose is this: In order to follow the Divine Manifestations and for the purpose of admonition and the commemoration of their state, it became incumbent upon the people to fast during those days. For every sincere soul who has a beloved longs to experience that state in which his beloved is. If his beloved is in a state of sorrow, he desires sorrow; if in a state of joy, he desires joy; if in a state of rest, he desires rest; if in a state of trouble, he desires trouble."

"Now, since in this Millennial Day, His Holiness the Supreme (the Bab) fasted many days, and the Blessed Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) took but little food or drink, it becomes necessary that the friends should follow that example...."

(From Table Talks by Abdu'l-Bahá, by Mrs. Corinne True: Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 18, p. 305)

1. **Travellers Are Exempt from Fasting — If One Eats Unconsciously, Fast is Not Broken**

"Regarding your question concerning the Fast: Travellers are exempt from fasting, but if they want to fast while they are travelling, they are free to do so. You are exempt the whole period of your travel, not just the hours you [pg 236] are in a train or car, etc. If one eats unconsciously during the fasting hours, this is not breaking the Fast as it is an accident. The age limit is seventy years, but if one desires to fast after the age limit is passed, and is strong enough to, one is free to do so. If during the Fast period a person falls ill and is unable to fast, but recovers before the Fast period is over, he can start to Fast again and continue until the end. Of course the Fast, as you know, can only be kept during the month set aside for that purpose."

(Shoghi Effendi: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, pp. 9-10)

1. **Fasting in High Latitudes**

"It is true that Bahá'u'lláh has ordained in the Kitab-i-Aqdas that in the high latitudes where the duration of days and nights varies considerably clocks should be relied upon rather than the rising and setting of the sun. However, we feel that Dublin is too far south for the application of this law. You should thus judge the end of each day by the actual sunset."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, August 8, 1969)

1. **Smoking is a Form of Drinking**

"In one of His Tablets Abdu'l-Bahá, after stating that fasting consists of abstinence from food and drink, categorically says that smoking is a form of 'drink'." (In Arabic the verb 'drink' applies equally to smoking.)

"In the East, therefore, the friends abstain from smoking during the hours of fasting, and friends from the East living in the West do likewise. But, as stated in our letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, this application of the Divine Law has not been extended to the friends in the West for the present, and therefore it should not be made an issue."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, March 15, 1972)

1. **Observance of Fast When Attending Military School**

"With reference to your son's request for advice regarding the observance of the Bahá'í fast: Much as the Guardian realizes the difficulty which a believer of his position, attending a military school, will have to encounter if he wishes to strictly conform to the regulations of the fast, he nevertheless would advise him to make every effort to obtain from the school authorities the necessary permission. In case his request is refused the only alternative for him would be to obey his superiors."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 27, 1938)

1. **Prayer for the Fast**

"O God! as I am fasting from the appetites of the body and not occupied with eating and drinking, even so purify and make holy my heart and my life from aught else save Thy Love, and protect and preserve my soul from self-passions and animal traits. Thus may the spirit associate with the Fragrances of Holiness and fast from everything else save Thy mention."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 18, p. 305) [pg 237]