

# The Wisdom of Fasting

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated from Persian



## The Wisdom of Fasting

**Question:** What is the divine wisdom of fasting?

**Answer:** There is many a divine wisdom in fasting. Among them is this: that, in the days when He Who is the Dayspring of the Sun of Truth engages, through divine inspiration, in revealing the verses of God, in establishing His religion, and in setting forth His teachings, He is so enraptured and enkindled as to find no time for food or drink. For example, when Moses went up to Mount Sinai to establish the religion of God, He fasted for forty days; and fasting was therefore enjoined upon the Israelites to awaken and admonish them. Likewise Christ, at the beginning of the foundation of His divine religion, the establishment of His teachings, and the formulation of His admonitions, disregarded for forty days all physical necessities and refrained from food and drink. The Apostles and early Christian believers also fasted, but this fast was changed by the Church Councils to abstinence from certain foods. Similarly, the Qur'án was revealed during the month of Ramaḍán<sup>4</sup> and therefore the fast was enjoined during that period. In the same way, in the beginning of His manifestation, the Báb would be so overcome with emotion at the revelation of the divine verses that for days He would confine himself to drinking tea. Likewise, in the days when He was instituting the divine teachings, and when the divine verses would be sent down continuously, Bahá'u'lláh would be so overwhelmed with the intensity of their influence and the emotions surging within His heart that He would take but little food.

Our meaning is that it has been enjoined upon the generality of the people to fast likewise for a few days, that they might follow the example of the divine Manifestations and call to mind Their state and condition. As history records, the Christians would in the early days observe a complete fast. For every sincere soul who has a beloved aspires to whatever condition his beloved is experiencing: If the beloved were sad he would wish for sorrow, and if joyous he would aspire to joy; if the beloved were at ease he would seek comfort, and if troubled he would desire the same. Now, since in those days the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh would abstain from food and drink, or would partake of only the least amount, it became incumbent upon Their loved ones to follow Their example. Even as it is said in the Tablet of Visitation: "... who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden".<sup>5</sup> This is but one of the wisdoms of fasting.

The second wisdom is that fasting is conducive to spiritual awareness. One's heart grows more tender, one's spirituality is increased, and as a result one's thoughts become purely focused on the remembrance of God. Such awareness and awakening leads inexorably to spiritual progress.



TRANSLATION

The third wisdom is this. There are two kinds of fast: material and spiritual. The material fast consists in abstaining from food and drink, that is, refraining from satisfying the physical appetites. But the true and spiritual fast is for man to forsake covetous desires, heedlessness, and evil and animalistic attributes. The material fast is therefore a symbol of that spiritual fast. It is like saying: "O Divine Providence! As I am abstaining from bodily desires and from all occupation with food and drink, even so purify and sanctify my heart from the love of anyone save Thyself, and shield and protect my soul from corrupt inclinations and satanic qualities, that my spirit may commune with the breaths of holiness and fast from the mention of all else besides Thee."