

Understanding Fasting Part 2

by Es-Seyyid Es-Shaykh Taner Ansari

Bismillah Al Rahman Al Rahim [In the name of Allah, The One Who Acts with Mercy, The Source of Mercy]. All praise belongs to Allah. Allah owns everything. All power belongs to Allah and not to us. May Allah's peace and blessings be on Prophet Muhammad and his family and on all the other prophets and their families.

We have some people who adhere to the letter of the *sharia* so they fast from sunup to sundown, which was 17 hours in 2015. Of course, the truth of the matter is, we cannot deny the Qur'an, and in the Qur'an it is from dawn, from before the sun rises, actually, until as soon as the sun sets, when you can't see it any more. But given the different parts of the world, especially towards the North Pole and towards the South Pole, the sunset and sunrise calculation is not applicable. Let's assume you are in Alaska or somewhere where there is, for example, six months of daylight. So you start fasting in April and you will have to break your fast in October or November. You'll fast, may Allah accept it, probably once. Then I don't know if you can fast a second day.

So, everybody doesn't have the courage to say we can do this like this or like that, but when I first became a Sufi, my Shaykh said, adjust your timetable to Istanbul. I am telling you that you have an option. In our area it is still doable; it is hard, but it is still doable. You have an option: either you use Saudi Arabia, where the Qur'an was revealed, or the closest doable place to you, e.g., Istanbul or some place in your area. I looked at Saudi Arabia. They are fasting for around 12 hours. This is not to replace what Allah said (that fasting is from dawn to sunset) but when we cannot do it, this is something you can do as plan B. This is not to replace the Qur'an, but Allah said to fast, and I am sure Allah (Who is *Rahman* [the One Who Acts with Mercy] and *Rahim* [The Source of Mercy]) will understand because the important thing is your intention.

What is your intention? "I still want to fast but I cannot fast for 17 hours" – Allah knows how much you can do, and that's why inside Saudi Arabia it is about 12 hours in the summer and 11 hours in the winter. But if you choose to follow Saudi Arabia's time, then when Ramadan comes in the winter, you still have to follow their timetable; you cannot say, "Here it's only four hours." In winter it's about six hours in Europe, and in the USA you choose to fast with your local timetable and in the summer you choose to follow Saudi Arabia's timetable – it does not work like that.

Too much of something is not good and too little is not good. When you fast your body goes through transformation, and so does your mind, your spiritual heart and your *nafs*. Your *nafs* is objecting saying, "Are you stupid, how can you willingly be hungry?" and your mind is saying, "I'd better comply" and your spirit is saying, "If you knew what is best, this is good for me and for you." You have all these agendas going through every part of your being. Even if you didn't choose a path to Allah, a special path to Allah like Sufism/*Tariqa*, this is a good training for the whole, for everybody.

What are we learning when we are fasting?

1) Resolution

When you fast, first of all you are practicing your resolution. You are resolving that

- I will not eat, drink and have sex.
- I will not speak badly about anybody or anything, no backbiting, no swearing.
- I will keep my mouth shut or limit my conversation.

(Actually that is better fasting than staying hungry. Staying hungry and thirsty but swearing at everybody is not fasting.)

Resolution means you are determining. In order to resolve you have to go back inside yourself and find that elemental feeling in you that you are not going to break your fast. You are going to do something that brings you to your quality that Allah likes the most. You have to keep your word. According to certain imams and scholars who made the deduction on this, if you make *niyyat*/intention to fast until noon, you have to finish it, and if you don't, the punishment is fasting for 60 days or you have to pay. Before sun up, you intend to fast, so you eat. When you make your intention, you are responsible.

Some people (I have seen this many times) say, "I want to lose weight and Ramadan is a good time to lose weight." So they fast not to please Allah or because it's good for their body. And then they gain more weight when the time comes to break the fast; all you have been doing is thinking about food and water, and then your *nafs* is hungry and you eat more than what you usually eat.

According to some doctors, it is not good for the body to be hungry that long, it imbalances the hormones and so on, especially your digestive system if you have IBS, acid reflux, etc. And some doctors say it is good for your body because your cells get the opportunity to empty and clean out. So you have to research. But Allah says to fast. I think it is good for you, good for many things. It might not be good for certain things. If you are one of those people with health issues you don't have to fast, but you have to pay. Allah always gives an alternative.

2) Devotion

What is the purpose for living on Earth? What is Allah's purpose for creating us? Allah's purpose is to teach us, to teach us Himself. What is our job? To learn. So we have to have a relationship with Allah, a system, that has already been designed called *iqam al salat*. So one of the trainings is fasting, and Allah says, "You are closest to me when you are fasting." When we are fasting, we need to keep in mind we are doing this for Allah; the similarity between you and Allah is that you do not eat or drink. When you do this willingly and smilingly it means that you are in devotion to Allah the whole way, not just five times a day, the whole day. And there is something to remind you of this; it is called hunger and thirst. Each time you are hungry, you say, "Why am I doing this?" For Allah. "Okay." "Why am I thirsty and not drinking?" Because Allah wants it. So you have a closer relationship to Allah for a longer time.

3) Attaining Good Habits

This is a practice for you to attain the habits that Allah likes. For a whole month you are practicing saying "no" to your *nafs*. Then you are practicing self-restraint. Self-restraint means that

- You are not going to swear.
- You are not going to talk badly about anybody or anything.
- You are not going to raise your voice.
- You are not going to get angry.
- You are practicing that you will keep your word.
- You are practicing that you are going to avoid bad conversations and arguments with people.

- You are practicing that you are going to contain yourself.

4) Gratitude

By voluntarily not doing the things you do every day, you can now see Allah's blessings that you cannot live without. You can hardly stand the twelve hours, how are you going to stand it for days? You cannot take for granted that when you're hungry, you can go to the refrigerator to get something. If Allah had added, "Do not breathe for 3 minutes every hour" then you would appreciate the breath. That would be harder to do. ﷻ So we learn to appreciate. We remember to appreciate Allah's blessings and see them as blessings that we take so much for granted

5) Tolerance

You practice tolerance because now you are hungry and irritable but still you must not use harsh words and a harsh voice. So you practice how to be tolerant with other people, maybe even with yourself. But we have to carry on what we practice to non-Ramadan months also. Then you have gained something and will have made progress.

6) Understanding

Fasting is supposed to bring you to understanding. What is the understanding? Understanding of those who are hungry. This is how they feel. There are hundreds and thousands of kids who go to bed hungry. No human being and no animals should be hungry. We need to understand. We need to help. In Turkey, especially in Ramadan, they send food to each other. In Ramadan, nobody goes hungry and all the poor people say, "I wish every month were Ramadan." So the understanding is to bring you to a certain understanding about others.

May Allah the Most High help us to understand the value and the virtues of this month and help us to do our best to live with it and practice it.

Allah doesn't need your hunger. Allah doesn't need your anything. This is all for your own development because this is a test period called *dunya* (the material world; life on earth). When it is over, is Allah going to talk to you or not? You are deciding that here. Allah is giving you opportunities. You choose how much as you are comfortable doing, but you cannot blame Allah. You cannot say to Allah, "I was with Mr. A or Ms. B, we were together, but he/she is all the way up, closer to You." You were together, but you chose how much to do. Allah will say, "I didn't put you here. You did!"

It is better for our psychological being if you don't object. If you keep objecting you will find peace nowhere. Ask yourself, if you were God would you do differently? The answer is, for me, gratitude. I said, "I thank You that You are God and not me." Good thing that HE is God. You can hardly manage yourself. How are you going to manage all these worlds? And there are many in space!

—Es-Seyyid Es-Shaykh Taner Ansari
June 27, 2015

Feed People

During Ramadan we do many different activities: community dinners, *iftar* dinners, if we can, especially carrying on having Sunday community/family dinners. Many people study subjects on

food. One thing that always seems to work is to feed people. When people get together and just eat without anything else, it creates a sense of positivity and wellbeing in the community. Later on, most of us remember how happy we were to eat the food at that moment, rather than how hard it was to stay hungry in all those hours. That is another sign that Allah created us in a positive state. You know hunger is a terrible thing. You would think that in this day and age nobody would stay hungry. In the States, there are hunger problems. Many kids go to bed hungry. In our *tariqa* we have sustainable living. Allah took us from California. We did not have water problems when we lived in California. We left California when Allah told us to move. Now they have such water problems. Our friend said, now if you go to restaurants, they don't bring you water. You have to ask for it, then they will charge you for it. I read on Facebook that if people grow their own vegetables, they use less water than corporations who grow food. How is it that we use a lot less water than corporations? So, our solution is that everybody should grow their own food, even if it's in your own apartments. My mother has actually proven to me that you can grow anything you want in an apartment.

I believe that fasting sharpens your mind and willpower and it's a personal responsibility to Allah. When we pray, and maybe in most of the Islamic world, we don't necessarily know what we are praying. Your Shaykh and I have given many speeches on, "You have to know what you're saying when you pray." In fasting it is not ritual actions. Every time you get hungry, you remind yourself that you are doing this for Allah and hunger is our most powerful instinct.

The Ansari Youth Club helps to plant sustainable living vegetable gardens for drug rehab programs. They plant thousands of vegetable plants and fruit trees. Little kids do this with adults. When you grow in a world like that, when you help other people grow their food, it is a good world.

If you want to be happier, do something to help someone else. I know we are all into self-- help and this is our century. Yet happier people are those who are generous and those who help other people. Our *tariqa* should be the happiest people and we have our emblem, *alhamdulillah*, that says we are Ansaris/Helpers.

—Es:Sharifa Es:Shaykha Muzeyyen Ansari
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Call of the Divine

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Editorial Staff: Shaykha Muzeyyen Ansari, Shaykha Elizabeth Muzeyyen Brown,
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