**RAMADAN CLASSES - Class 3**

**CHAPTER 3**

On the Mysteries of Fasting and its *Inner* Practices

***OUTER* PARTS OF THE FAST:**

* What is required
* What happens when the fast is broken in different ways
* Sunna’s of Fasting

***INNER* ASPECTS OF THE FAST:**

**3 LEVELS OF FASTING**

1. Most people.

Those who give up eating, drinking and other low desires.

1. The fasting of the elect. Those whom Allah (swt) chooses to bring near.

They keep every part of their body from doing any bad deeds: their hearing, seeing, speaking, their hands and feet.

1. The fasting of the elect of the elect. “People of the Heart” God’s Prophets’ and those nearest to Him.

Those whom Allah chooses to receive a special kind of knowledge. They observe a ‘fast of the heart.’ They fast from all thoughts, concerns or worries about their daily lives in this world. These great men and women consider their fast to be broken even by *thinking* of someone else besides God and the Last Day! They only think of things that would support their spiritual inner lives – not their outer worldly doings. This is very rare, but it is possible. They consider it a sin even to think about what they will eat to break fast…as this shows a lack of trust in God’s provision. They are people who turn away from everyone but Him. They understand the following Quranic verse:

*“Say Allah and leave them to their vain play (6:91).”*

**WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM KNOWING ABOUT THE 3 LEVELS OF FASTING?**

**1. LESSONS FROM GROUP 3:**

**The fasting of the elect of the elect.** “People of the Heart” God’s Prophets’ and those nearest to Him.

Trust that God is taking care of us in the best way, that only he can do. After all, He knows everything.

(Relate the story of the Ant and the Pen, in the Book of Knowledge).

God arranges for the highest good to take place in our lives, even if it looks like a difficult trial. Trials and blessings are really the same thing. They’re both just ways of polishing our hearts and bringing us nearer to God.

**2. LESSONS FROM GROUP 2:**

**The fasting of the elect.** Those whom Allah (swt) chooses to bring near. They keep every part of their body from doing any bad deeds, as they see life as a spiritual journey.

There are SIX INNER PRACTICES done by the righteous people (The Saliheen):

**1. SEEING**

What can our eyes do to help us fast?

Be careful not to let our eyes look at anything that may take us far away from God (swt). (As in prayer when we also lower our gaze in order to not be distracted from being present before God (swt).

**2. SPEAKING**

What can our mouth do to help us fast?

The mouth can say things, which hurt other peoples’ feelings:

Lying

Backbiting/gossiping

Slander

Swearing a false oath against someone

Bragging

Arguing

These things all break the *inner* fast. The tongue needs to fast along with the rest of the body. It would be better to be silent, repeating God’s names or reciting the Quran.

The Prophet (saw) said that fasting is like a protective shield. We shouldn’t say low things or be foolish. If someone wishes to pick a fight with you or speaks badly, you must say, “I am Fasting” (Bukhari, Muslim).

Backbiting

Allah (swt) says in the Quran that it’s just like eating a person’s dead flesh. A horrible image! In his Book on the Mysteries of Fasting, Imam al-Ghazali mentions the hadith about the two gossiping women who found fasting so difficult, they might die. They sent a message to the Prophet (saw) asking permission to break their fast. He (saw) responded by sending them a large bowl with the message, “Tell them to throw up what they have eaten into this bowl!” People watching were shocked to see that they vomited blood! Bits of flesh began filling the bowl.”

That’s disgusting and horrific, because backbiting is *that* terrible.

**3. HEARING**

What can our ears do to help us fast?

Even listening to backbiting, or being silent when it is happening, makes you a partner in this grave sin. Whatever you are forbidden to say with your tongue is also forbidden for you to *hear* or listen to with your ears.

**4. HANDS & FEET**

What can our hands and feet do to help us fast?

In wudu as we wash our hands, we ask God (swt) to forgive us for things we wish we hadn’t done, and as we wash our feet, to guide us to what pleases Him. We want our feet to carry us to good places that we can be proud of.

**5. STOMACH**

What can the stomach do to help us fast correctly?

We shouldn’t break our fast with large amounts of food. When fasting, we are supposed to eat less overall. Of course you are still growing children and you need to eat well – especially teenagers! But once you’re fully grown, large quantities of food are harmful to our bodies, even if the food is healthy. Adults should eat what they normally have for dinner, but not add in the lunch that they missed.

If you make up all the food you missed during the day, and then add all kinds of special desserts and extra nice foods, how can fasting help you to overcome the whisperings of the lower self?

The goal of fasting is to become *empty.* Weakening the body’s energy helps increase our spiritual lives.

*We curb our bodily desires to help our souls improve. Feeling thirst and hunger helps us to remember God (swt), which cleans and polishes our hearts. It helps our spiritual life.*

Whoever places a ‘feedbag’ (stomach) between his heart and his breast will be veiled from understanding deeper truths. Emptying the stomach and longing *only* for God (swt) will lift the veil inshallah.

Imam al-Ghazali says that if we are in an empty state on the Night of Power, we might be able to glimpse the heavenly dominion!

**6. KEEP YOUR HEART BETWEEN FEAR & HOPE**

When we are breaking our fast, we should keep our hearts between fear and hope. Even if we have tried to do the 5 previous practices mentioned of the elect people, we can never be sure that our fast has been accepted by God (swt). We don’t know if our actions have bought us nearer to Him. We should be humble and remember that we are weak and make mistakes, and that only God (swt) is perfect. We love Him (so) much and are trying to please him by polishing our hearts.

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| **PRACTICAL TIPS**  |
| * **Limit time on TV, devices and the Internet.** In order to spend your timing seeing and hearing what is beneficial.
* **Do a technology fast.** Put away your smart phone and use a basic phone instead. Turn it on for only a few hours each day.
* **Don’t gossip or backbite.** Remember that these things are below your dignity and should be stopped. We should never ever do it! Everyone hates being gossiped about, so why do people keep doing it? Just imagine if no one ever spoke badly about another…how peaceful the world would be!
* **Do the outer and inner wudu.** Ask Allah to forgive you for things you wish you hadn’t done and to guide you to what pleases him.
* **Don’t overeat at Iftar.** Remember that the feeling of hunger is actually reminding us of God (swt) and helping to polish our hearts.
* **Remember to be humble.** After any form of worship like fasting, prayer or wudu, do not think, “Well I did a great job, exactly as I should have done correctly” Be humble and remember that only Allah (swt) is perfect.
* **If someone makes you angry, say “I am fasting** “Imam al-Ghazali mentions that our Prophet (saw) said “Fasting is truly a trust (amana), so let each of you guard his trust. And as the Prophet (saw) recited God’s (swt) words, he (swt) places his hands on his ears and eyes and said ‘Hearing is a trust. Sight is a trust.’ These are part of the trust of fasting. Again remember: if someone speaks badly to us when we are fasting we should say, “Verily I am fasting” (and then avoid arguing with him or her). That is to say, “I have been given my tongue as a trust to watch over, so why should I answer your insults?”
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**3. LESSONS FROM GROUP 1:**

**Most people.**

Those who give up eating, drinking and other low desires, but they do not pay attention to the inner aspects of fasting.

Imam al-Ghazali explained that for any act of worship to be *truly valid and accepted* it must be able to achieve its goal.

He says that the fast of someone who doesn’t observe the six inner practices – keeping his eyes, tongue, ears and so on free from sin - is incomplete.

The ideal way to fast is both inwardly and outwardly.

**THE GOAL OF FASTING**

*Drawing closer to God (swt) through realising some attribute of God, in his own character.*

* “The goal of fasting is for a human being to realise some attribute of God (swt) in his own character.”

In the case of fasting, this is God’s attribute of *Everlasting Independence. Al Samadiyya.*

* When a person fasts, they also imitate the angels as much as possible who are beyond wanting or needing anything. The angels are nearest to God, so if we try to be like the angels, maybe we can draw closer to God (swt) too.
* We know that the Prophet (saw) said that he was sent ‘only to perfect good character’.

Drawing closer to God (swt) is not a physical closeness, but learning to have the *character* of those who are close to God (swt). This is why we want to have the character of our beloved Prophet (saw).

* Imam al-Ghazali reminds us that ‘every act of worship has an outward and an inward aspect. If we compare it to a grain, it has both a husk and a kernel. Even the husks have various degrees, and each degree has different levels. So the choice is now *yours* to make. Will you be satisfied with only the outer husk? Or will you seek both the husk and the kernel inside, and thereby join the ranks of those who have been granted wisdom and understanding.

1. Fasting of most people



2. Fasting of the elect

 

+



FEAR
&
HOPE

3. Fasting of the elect of the elect



+



FEAR
&
HOPE

+

 

Fasting of seeing



Fasting of Speaking



 lying

 Backbiting



Slander – accusing someone of something they didn’t do

 Swearing a false oath

 Bragging

 Arguing

Fasting of Hearing



 Don’t listen to backbiting



Don’t listen to insults and swearing. Say: “Iam fasting”

The Prophet (saw) said:

Fasting is like a protective shield. We shouldn’t say low things or be foolish. If someone wishes to pick a fight with you or speaks badly, you must say, “I am fasting” (Bukhari and Muslim)



FASTING

The Fasting of the hands and feet

