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# Fasting a Time of Spiritual House Cleaning

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Feb 2, 2022 9:49 AM



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Those who know me are aware of my love for fasting. I have participated in the Baha'i Fast, 19 days of abstaining from food and drink between sunrise and sunset, every year since the age of 15.

Please don't misunderstand me. Even with all these years of experience, my body has never liked it and has made it clear to me that it does not share my enthusiasm.

[Baha'i](#) fasting is both a physical and spiritual exercise, which is why I am so attracted to it.

I love fasting because I know as a human being during my daily life, I unknowingly subject my soul to many impurities, and with this awareness, fasting has become my annual "House Cleaning."

In the same way that people clean their houses in the West before Christmas or in Iran before the New Year

(Naw-Ruz), I do the cleaning with my soul.

My friends who are from different religions cannot understand why I put myself through this hardship. They think the Fast is not a good idea, but their concern allows me to inform them that fasting has been a part of most religions. When food is always available in modern life, people have forgotten about fasting to the extent that now they find it a strange practice. However, history gives us evidence of the existence of fasting in most cultures and religions.

Fasting has been part of coming-of-age preparations for adulthood. Boys from native cultures in North America would fast in the wilderness, seeking a vision of a guardian spirit. Hindus have some form of fasting, which is an avoidance of a particular food. Generally, the ladies fast for the sake of their husbands. The Sadhus of India and Sufis fast and meditate for enlightenment. Modern Jews fast for 24 hours as a penance.

Fasting is also very much part of the life of priests – holy men of various societies would fast in preparation for particular rituals. In most mystical and monastic traditions, fasting is practiced as a means of purification. Roman Catholics traditionally abstain from meat on days associated with the passion of Christ. Added to that list are the Manifestations of God, who fasted and meditated to commune with God.

Islam is one religion that strictly tries to observe the law of fasting. In addition to obligatory prayer, fasting is the essential ritual obligation of the Muslim; it is one of the five pillars of Islam. Fasting in Islam consists of deliberately abstaining from all food, drink, and sexual relations from the time of the first light before dawn until the last light after sunset. The Qur'an explicitly states that fasting is an obligation and has been central to earlier religions.

It is important to remember that the essence of fasting is the spiritual part of fasting. If depriving oneself of food was a sign of spirituality, then all the food insecure people in the world would be holy men and saints.

*“For this material fast is an outer token of the spiritual fast; it is a symbol of self-restraint, the withholding of oneself from all appetites of the self, taking on the characteristics of the spirit, being carried away by the breathings of heaven and catching fire from the love of God.” –Abdu'l-Baha*

I believe that all the spiritual laws of God are for the benefit of humanity, and the direct gain is for the individual who obeys them and follows them.

Each year I pretend that I do not know anything about fasting and read the Holy Writings with an eager soul to uncover their mysteries and, combined with meditation, to try to get rid of the filth that has attached itself to my soul. In a way, it is a time of self-examination, and as I get older, I find more benefits in fasting.

Science has now found that intermittent fasting is very beneficial for our bodies. It maintains that by not eating for a length of time, the body gets to direct its energies towards repairs. This does not surprise me at all because I am discovering the wisdom and physical benefits of it. I am waiting for the day when humankind gets the chance to experience the sublime feeling of detachment from the body's need for food and focuses on cleansing the spiritual aspect of their lives so that we can start the process of the unification of humanity.

It may look strange to connect fasting with unity, but if we think deeply, we realize that most conflicts and problems are caused by the lack of a spiritual approach to the issues. That makes fasting and praying the most effective tools. Souls are linked together with a string of divinity.

I hope this year I can again introduce my mind and soul to fasting and experience the sense of purification by following this instruction for my spiritual betterment.

*Badi Shams is a Baha'i and a mystic at heart, whose field of interest is in economics. He has published a compilation "Economics of the Future", and also more recently the book "Economics of the Future Begins Today". He is retired from the educational system. You can read more of Badi's materials on his website*

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