

Chapter XXI

The Uncovering of the Seventh Veil

Fasting (al-sawm الصوم)

Allah hath said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you,” (Q 2:183).

And the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that he was informed by Gabriel (may blessings of Allah be on him) that Allah said:

الصوم لي وأنا اجزي به

“Fasting is for Me, and I have the best right to give recompense for it”

Fasting is an inwardly devotion and has no outwardly connection. The others cannot know about this devotion, therefore its recompense is in abundance.

It is said that mankind will enter in Paradise through Allah’s mercy, and that their rank therein depend on their religious devotion, and that their abiding therein for ever is the recompense of their fasting, that’s why Allah said that He Himself would give recompense for it. Junaid said:

الصوم نصف الطريقة

“Fasting is half of the Mystic way of life.”

Some of the Sheikhs used to fast perpetually and some fasted only during the month of Ramadan. Their fasting during Ramadan was to seek recompense and not to fast other than Ramadan was to safeguard against hypocrisy and to renounce self will. I have seen many Sheikhs who used to fast but people would not come to know about their fasting as they would eat if somebody set food before them. This is more in accordance with the *Sunnah*. Aisha and Hafsa (the mothers of the believers, may Allah be pleased with them) related that one day when Prophet (peace be upon him) came home we told him that we had prepared sweetmeat of dates for him. He

said that he intended to fast but now instead he would fast on some other day and asked them to bring the sweetmeat.

I have seen Sheikhs who fasted on the "white days" (from the 13th to the 15th of every month), and on the tenth of Muharam, and also during Rajab, Shaiban, and Ramadan (lunar months). I have also seen Sheikhs who observed the fast of David, which the Prophet (peace be upon him) called the best of the fasts, i.e. they fasted one day and broke their fast the next day.

Once I came into presence of Sheikh Ahmad Bukhari. He had a dish of sweetmeat before him, from which he was eating, and he made a sign that I should join him. I in a very childish way answered that I was fasting. He asked me why I was fasting. I told him that it was in conformity with such and such. The Sheikh said that it was not right for human beings to conform to human beings. I was about to break my fast, but he said, "Since you wish to quit conformity with him, do not conform to me, for I too am a human being."

The reality of fasting is abstinence, and the total mystery of Sufism is hidden in it. The least degree in fasting is hunger. "الجموع طعام الله في الارض" to remain in hunger is Allah's food on earth." According to law and reason hunger is commendable.

One month's continual fasting is incumbent on every Muslim who has attained to manhood, is sensible, healthy and resident. The fast begins on the appearance of the moon of Ramadan, or on the completion of the month of Shaiban. For every fast sincere intention and firm obligation are necessary. Abstinence involves many obligations, e.g.

- keeping the belly without food and drink, and
- guarding the eyes from lustful looks, the ear from listening to evil speech and backbiting, and tongue from vain or foul words, and
- guarding of the body from submission to worldly things and disobedience to Allah.

One who acts in this manner would truly be observing the fast, for the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "اذا صمت فليصم سمعك و" اذا صمت فليصم سمعك و" when you fast, let your ear, eye, and your tongue should also fast." And he also said, "رب صائم ليس له من صومه الا الجوع" many who fast are such that they do not gain anything from their fasting except hunger and thirst."

I saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) in my dream and asked him to give me a word of counsel. He said, "احبس حواسك" imprison your senses." To keep the senses imprisoned is real self-mortification, because all kinds of knowledge is acquired through these five senses:

- sight, its place is eye which see the world and colors.
- hearing, ears are the place of hearing and they hear the voice.
- taste, palate is the place of taste
- smell, nose is the place of smell, and
- touch has no special locus but is spread in all the limbs of the body and which are sensible to cold, hot, severity and gentleness.

These senses are the commander of the intellect and knowledge. Four of them have particular locus, but the fifth, namely touch, is spread over the whole body. Everything that becomes known to human beings passes through these five doors, except intuitive knowledge and Divine inspiration. There is no chance of any err in intuitive knowledge and Divine inspiration, but senses possess purity and impurity also. Just as senses are open to knowledge, reason, and spirit, so they are open to imagination and passion. The senses act jointly both in case of piety and sin or felicity and misery, e.g., the true friendship side between eye and ear is that they see and hear the truth and evil side is that they see the lust and hear useless talk. In case of touch, taste and smell the friendship to truth is to obey the command of Allah and evil side is to move against the *Shariat*. It behooves on who is fasting to imprison all his senses in order that they may return from disobedience to obedience, so that he may qualify as true fast observer. To abstain only from food and drink is work of old women and children. The true fasting is that man should be free from others, and save himself from the worldly desires and forbidden things. Allah hath said, "وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَسَدًا لَّا يَأْكُلُونَ الطَّعَامَ" nor did We give them bodies that ate no food," (Q 21:8), and "أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا" did ye then think that We had created you in jest," (Q 23:115).

The spirit of fasting is to abstain from idle pleasures and unlawful acts, for fasting is not only to refrain from eating lawful food. I marvel at those who say that they were keeping a voluntary fast and yet fail to perform obligatory duties. Not to commit sin is obligatory, whereas continual fasting is an

apostolic custom (which may be observed or neglected). When a man protects himself from disobedience all his circumstances are fast.

It is related by Abu Talha Malki that Sahl b. Abdullah Tustari was fasting on the day of his birth and also on the day of his death, as he was born in the forenoon and drank no milk until the evening payer, and on the day of his death he was fasting.

The continual fasting has been forbidden by the Prophet (peace be upon him), although he used to fast continually, and when his companions conformed with him in that respect, he forbade them, saying:

اني لست كما حدكم اني ابيت عند ربي يطعمني ويسقيني

"I am not as one of you: I pass the night with my Lord, who gives me food and drink."

The votaries of self-mortification assert that this prohibition was an act of affection, and not that it was unlawful. Others regard it as being contrary to the *Sunnah*, but the fact is that continuance in fasting is impossible, because the day's fast is interrupted by night and even if the intention of fast is made in the night, still continuance will not be there.

It is said about Sahl b. Abdullah that he used to eat only once in fifteen days. During Ramadan he would eat nothing throughout the month until the Eid day, and used to pray four hundred *rakaat* on every night. This exceeds the limit of human endurance, and cannot be accomplished by anyone without Divine aid, which becomes his nourishment.

It is well known that Sheikh Abu Nasr Saraj, (the author of book *al- Lama*) who was known as the Peacock of the Poor, came to Baghdad in the month of Ramadan. He was given a private chamber in the Shuniziyya mosque, and was asked to lead the prayers of dervishes. He led their *trawih* prayer throughout the month and recited the whole Quran five times. Every night a servant brought a loaf of bread to his room. When he departed, on the Eid day, the servant found all the thirty loaves untouched.

Ali b. Bakr relates that Hafs Mussisi ate nothing in Ramadan except on the fifteenth day of that month.

Ibrahim Adham ate nothing from the beginning to the end of Ramadan, though it was summer season. He used to labor as a harvester throughout the day and would give his earning to dervishes. He used to remain in devotion throughout the night. The people secretly monitored his activities and saw that he neither ate nor slept.

Sheikh Abu Abdullah Khafif before his death had observed forty uninterrupted solitudes of forty days each.

I have met with an old man who used to observe two solitudes annually of forty days each.

I was present with Danishmand Abu Muhammad Banfisi at the time of his death. He had not eaten any food for eighty days and in spite of that had not missed a single occasion of public worship.

There were two elders at Merv; one was called Masud and the other was Sheikh Abu Ali Siyah. Masud sent a message to Abu Ali, saying: "For how long shall we make empty pretensions, let us sit in seclusion for forty days and don't eat anything." Abu Ali replied: "No, let us eat three times a day and remain in seclusion for forty days with single purification."

The difficulties of this question still remains, as ignorant conclude that continuance in fasting is not possible, while physician allege that such a theory is entirely baseless. I will now explain the matter in detail so that ambiguity is removed.

Perpetual fasting, without infringing the Divine command, is a *karamat* (miracle), and *karamat* is graced to elects and not to everyone. When *karamat* is not common then how can its commands e.g., perpetual fasting, be common. If they were vouchsafed to all, faith would be an act of necessity and Gnostic would not be recompense on account of gnosis. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was man of evidentiary miracles and therefore he outwardly divulged perpetual fasting, but he forbade the men of *karamat* (saints) to reveal it, because a *karamat* involves concealment, whereas a miracle involves revelation. This is a clear distinction between the miracles performed by Prophets and the *karamat* performed by saints. This much should be sufficient for anyone who is divinely guided.

The forty days' seclusion of the saints is derived from the state of Moses. When the saints desire to hear the word of

Allah spiritually, they remain in hunger for forty days. After thirty days they cleanse their teeth and spend ten more days. Hence, Allah speaks to their hearts, because whatever the prophets enjoy openly the saints may enjoy secretly. It is not possible to hear the word of Allah in the presence of phenomenal subsistence, therefore, the four humors must be overwhelmed by depriving them of food and drink for forty days, and that the purity of love and the subtlety of the spirit may hold absolute sway. Since this involves hunger therefore, now I will ponder upon the reality of hunger.

Hunger and Matters Connected with it

Allah hath said:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ

“Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil),” (Q 2:155)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

بطن جاءع احب الي الله من سبعين عابداً غافلاً

“Man with empty belly is more preferred before Allah than the seventy heedless worshipers.”

It's a noble act to remain with hunger and it has the approval among all the religions and nations. Outwardly hunger sharpens the intelligence and improves the mind and health, particularly of that person who by reducing his food has adorned himself. Hunger produces humility in the heart and humbleness in the *nafs* (lower soul) and diminishes its power. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

اجيعو بطونكم واطماوا اكبادكم واعروا اجسادكم لعل قلوبكم يرون الله غيانا في الدنيا

“make your bellies hungry and your livers thirsty and do not put your bodies in adornment of dress, that perchance your hearts may have the vision of Allah in this world.”

Although hunger causes pain to the body, but it illuminates the heart, purifies the soul, and leads the spirit unto the presence of the Truth. The body afflictions are neglected when spiritually one is blessed with vision, spirit is purified and heart is illuminated. To eat one's fill is not a good act, for were it an