

## The Metaphysics of Fasting

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*Three Purposes of and Six Benefits of Fasting*  
*Fasting*

Below is a translation from the relevant section from the *Hujjah al-Bālighah* of Shāh Walī Allāh:

### أسرار الصوم

#### The Secrets of Fasting

اعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ رُبَّمَا يَتَفَتِنُ الْإِنْسَانُ مِنْ قَبْلِ إِيْهِامِ الْحَقِّ إِيَّاهُ أَنَّ سُورَةَ الطَّبِيعَةِ الْبَهِيمِيَّةِ تَصْدَهُ عَمَّا هُوَ كَمَالُهُ مِنْ انْقِيَادِهَا لِلْمَلَكِيَّةِ، فَيَبْغِضُهَا، وَيَطْلُبُ كَسْرَ سَوْرَتِهَا، فَلَا يَجِدُ مَا يَغِيْثُهُ فِي ذَلِكَ، كَالْجُوعِ وَالْعَطْشِ، وَتَرْكِ الْجَمَاعِ وَالْأَخْذِ عَلَى لِسَانِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَوَارِحِهِ، وَيَتَمَسَّكَ بِذَلِكَ عِلَاجًا لِمَرْضِهِ النَّفْسَانِي.

**Know** that it is possible for a person, through *divine inspiration*, to realise that the nature of the animalistic self prevents them from achieving their perfection by following the angelic nature. Thus, they may despise it and seek to break its power. They may not find anything to aid them in this except hunger, thirst, abstaining from sexual relations, controlling their tongue, heart, and limbs, and adhering to these as a treatment for their psychological ailment.

وَيَتْلُوهُ: مَنْ يَأْخُذُ ذَلِكَ عَنِ الْمَخْبَرِ الصَّادِقِ بِشَهَادَةِ قَلْبِهِ.

ثُمَّ الَّذِي يَقُوْدُهُ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ شَفَقَةً عَلَيْهِ، وَهُوَ لَا يَعْلَمُ، فَيَجِدُ فَائِدَةَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْمَعَادِ مِنْ انْكَسَارِ السُّوْرَةِ.



**And it follows:** Whoever takes this *from the truthful informant* with the testimony of their heart. Then, the one *guided by the prophets* out of compassion for them, without their knowledge, finds the benefit of this in the hereafter from the breaking of the form.

## مقاصد الصوم

١. وَرُبَّمَا يَطْلُع الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَى أَنَّ انْقِيَادَ الطَّبِيعَةِ لِلْعَقْلِ كَمَالٌ لَهُ، وَتَكُونُ طَبِيعَتُهُ بَاغِيَةً تَنْقَادَ تَارَةً، وَلَا تَنْقَادُ أُخْرَى، فَيَحْتَاجُ إِلَى تَمَرِينٍ، فَيَعْمِدُ إِلَى عَمَلٍ شَاقٍّ كَالصَّوْمِ، فَيَكْلِفُ طَبِيعَتَهُ، وَيَلْتَزِمُ وَفَاءَ الْعَهْدِ، ثُمَّ، وَثُمَّ حَتَّى يَحْصُلَ الْأَمْرُ الْمَطْلُوبُ.

### Purposes of Fasting:

1. It is possible for a person to realise that the *submission of nature to reason* is a perfection for them. Their nature may sometimes comply and sometimes not, so they need training. They undertake a difficult task like fasting, imposing it on their nature, and committing to fulfilling the covenant, again and again, until the desired outcome is achieved.

٢. وَرُبَّمَا يَفْرُطُ مِنْهُ ذَنْبٌ، فَيَلْتَزِمُ صَوْمَ أَيَّامٍ كَثِيرَةٍ يَشْقُ عَلَيْهِ بِإِزَاءِ الذَّنْبِ، لِيَرُدَّ عَنْ الْعُودِ فِي مِثْلِهِ.

2. It is possible that a *person commits a sin*, so they commit to fasting for many difficult days as a countermeasure to the sin, to deter them from returning to similar actions.

٣. وَرُبَّمَا تَأَقَّتْ نَفْسُهُ إِلَى النِّسَاءِ، وَلَا يَجِدُ طَوْلًا، وَيَخَافُ الْعَنَتَ، فَيَكْسِرُ شَهْوَتَهُ بِالصَّوْمِ، وَهُوَ قَوْلُهُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: " فَإِنَّ الصَّوْمَ لَهُ وَجَاءٌ.

3. It is possible that a person desires women but cannot afford to marry and fears hardship, so they break their desire through fasting. This is in accordance with the saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him): "Fasting is a shield for him"

## فوائد الصوم



١. وَالصَّوْمُ حَسَنَةٌ عَظِيمَةٌ، يَقْوَى الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَيُضْعَفُ الْبَهِيمِيَّةُ، وَلَا شَيْءٌ مِثْلُهُ فِي صَقْلِ وَجْهِ الرُّوحِ، وَقَهْرِ الطَّبِيعَةِ، وَلَكَذَلِكَ قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى " :الصَّوْمُ لِي وَأَنَا أُجْزِي بِهِ " .

1. Fasting is a great virtue; it strengthens the angelic nature and weakens the animalistic nature. There is nothing like it in refining the soul and subduing nature. Therefore, Allah the Almighty said: "Fasting is for Me, and I will reward it".

٢. وَيَكْفِرُ الْخَطَايَا بِقَدْرِ مَا اضْمَحَلَّ مِنْ سُورَةِ الْبَهِيمِيَّةِ .

2. It expiates sins to the extent that the animalistic nature diminishes.

٣. وَيَحْصُلُ بِهِ تَشَبُّهُ عَظِيمٌ بِالْمَلَائِكَةِ، فَيُحِبُّونَهُ، فَيَكُونُ مُتَعَلِّقُ الْحُبِّ إِثْرَ ضَعْفِ الْبَهِيمِيَّةِ، وَهُوَ قَوْلُهُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " :خُلُوفُ فَمِ الصَّائِمِ أَطْيَبُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ رِيحِ الْمِسْكِ " .

3. Through fasting, one achieves a great resemblance to the angels, who then love them. This love is a result of the weakening of the animalistic nature. This is in accordance with the saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him): "The breath of the fasting person is more pleasant to Allah than the scent of musk".

٤. وَإِذَا جَعَلَ رِسْمًا مَشْهُورًا نَفَعَ عَنْ غَوَائِلِ الرُّسُومِ .

4. And if it becomes a well-known practice, it protects against the harms of other practices.

٥. وَإِذَا التَّزَمَهُ أُمَّةٌ مِنَ الْأُمَمِ سَلَسَلَتْ شَيَاطِينُهَا، وَفَتَحَتْ أَبْوَابَ جَنَّاتِهَا، وَغَلَقَتْ أَبْوَابَ النَّارِ عَنْهَا .

5. And if a nation commits to it, their devils are chained, the gates of paradise are opened for them, and the gates of hell are closed against them.

٦. وَالْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا سَعَى فِي قَهْرِ النَّفْسِ وَإِزَالَةِ رذَائِلِهَا، كَانَتْ لِعَمَلِهِ صُورَةٌ تَقْدِيسِيَّةٌ فِي الْمِثَالِ، وَمِنْ أَزْكَيَاءِ الْعَارِفِينَ مَنْ يَتَوَجَّهَ إِلَى هَذِهِ الصُّورَةِ، فَيَمْدُ مِنَ الْغَيْبِ فِي عِلْمِهِ، فَيَصِلُ إِلَى الذَّاتِ مِنْ قَبْلِ التَّنْزِيهِ وَالتَّقْدِيسِ، وَهُوَ مَعْنَى قَوْلِهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " :الصَّوْمُ لِي وَأَنَا أُجْزِي بِهِ " .



6. When a person strives to subdue the self and remove its vices, their actions take on a sanctified form in the imaginal realm.<sup>1</sup> Among the enlightened knowers, there are those who focus on this form and are thus assisted in knowledge from the unseen realm, thus reaching the soul through purification and sanctification. This is the meaning of the saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him): “Fasting is for Me, and I will reward it”.

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<sup>1</sup> This realm exists for the highest angels and the souls of the virtuous liberated from their corporeal forms, and it is known as the Holy Enclosure (*ḥazīrat al-Quds*). This group is designated as the Highest Council (*al-mala' al-a'lā*).