



dictatorial possibilities of institutional enforcement. Fasting is the responsibility of each individual to undertake to the best of his or her ability, within the requirements of that person's life, work and circumstances.

Bahá'u'lláh has commanded exemptions to the fast for those whose health, physical growth, or safety might be compromised by adherence to it. These exemptions are as much obligations as is the abstention from food and drink. The Lord of the Age does not compel us to harm ourselves by excessive zeal in fasting.

These thoughts come from 27 years of experience as a Bahá'í. I once believed that my own well-being and salvation depended on a punctilious observance of the most stringent and rigid requirements of Bahá'u'lláh's commandments. Such an attitude led to my attempt to fast even when I became ill. I developed an excessively critical eye toward the attempts of my fellow believers to observe the obligation, including their use of the exemptions. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States reminded us in a feast letter that we live in a society in which people "pride themselves on being bitterly critical in order to justify their conflicts with others."

I believe that Bahá'u'lláh's purpose in ordaining the fast goes well beyond our puny conceptions. It was not to create a law by which to parade our good works and piety to others, nor a yardstick to condone the judging of others' sincerity in observance of their private spiritual obligations. Rather, it is Bahá'u'lláh's map to the moderate path that He so unfailingly recommended. He reveals the following in the Kitab-i-Aqdas:

"Lament not in your hours of trial, neither rejoice therein; seek ye the Middle Way which is remembrance of Me in your afflictions and reflection over that which may befall you in future. Thus informeth you He Who is the Omniscient, He Who is aware."(3)

Whether an individual Bahá'í is fasting fully, partially or not at all, the month of Loftiness is a reminder and remembrance. We remember who we are, with Whom we must converse, to Whom we owe our allegiance, and toward Whom we must journey. Thus reminded, we see Bahá'u'lláh standing before us, always beckoning us forward into the light.

Footnotes:

The Bahá'í fasting period takes place between March 2-20 inclusive. During this time, Bahá'ís do not drink or eat between sunrise and sunset.

Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh From the Arabic No. 13.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, no. 43 p. 35.

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