

fasting at some time during their ministry. Often they have withdrawn to some place of seclusion in order to commune with God in preparation for undertaking their supreme task of bringing God's message to the world. When They do undertake Their ministry, They are often so occupied with revealing the words of God that they have little time or inclination to feed the body. The Bahá'í fast is partly in remembrance of this.

Health Considerations

Those who have experienced fasting know that the body gradually adjusts to a different routine and under normal circumstances can cope well with lack of nourishment for 12 hours.

"Verily, I say that God has appointed a great station for fasting and prayer.

But during good health its benefit is evident, and when one is ill, it is not permissible to fulfil them."

As Bahá'ís believe that disease occurs when there is a lack of balance in the nutrients provided by a person's diet, it therefore follows that if someone is ill they need to redress this balance. Going without food may not help the healing process. With some illnesses, such as diabetes, it would be positively harmful to fast. Bahá'ís should abide by the advice of their doctors.

"A man is not fit to do service for God with brain or body if he is weakened by lack of food."

There are various circumstances under which Bahá'u'lláh said that the Fast is not binding. Those who are ill, pregnant and nursing mothers, those doing heavy manual labour, even those travelling for a long time, are all exempt from the Fast.

Bahá'ís should observe the Fast from the age of maturity, which is fixed at 15, until the age of 70.

A Time Of Joy

The time of the Fast can be a time of joy. It should be a time of prayer, of drawing closer to God. If it is not approached in the right spirit, it will be of no benefit:

"Mere abstention from food has no effect on the spirit. It is only a symbol, a reminder."

Fasting is a spiritual act which should result in an improvement in character and concern for others. It is not an end in itself. Bahá'u'lláh wrote that vowing to fast (in a month other than the one prescribed for fasting) was allowable but that vows which profit mankind are preferable.

If we believe that God, as our Creator, knows what is best for us both spiritually and physically, we should be able to obey His laws with complete confidence and trust:

"Whatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil."

The exercise of self-control involved in fasting is of great benefit to the soul.

"The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station."

Fasting, like prayer, is between the individual and God:

"But while a universal obligation, the observance of the nineteen-day Fast has been made by Bahá'u'lláh the sole responsibility of the individual believer. No Assembly has the right to enforce it on the friends, or to hold anyone responsible for not observing it."

Bahá'ís often meet together at dawn during the Fast, to say prayers together and to share a meal. They will also quite often meet together to break their fast in the evening.

The New Year Celebration

The day of the spring equinox which signals the end of the Fast is a Holy Day for Bahá'ís. This is the first day of the new year and is known as Naw Ruz. It is a time of celebration, of starting the new year spiritually refreshed.

"We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw Ruz as a feast."

This is from a prayer specially for Naw Ruz:

"Praise be Thou, O my God, that Thou hast ordained Naw Ruz as a festival unto those who have observed the Fast for love of Thee and abstained from all that is abhorrent to Thee. Grant, O my Lord, that the fire of Thy love and the heat produced by the Fast enjoined by Thee may inflame them in Thy cause, and make them to be occupied with Thy praise and with remembrance of Thee."

A Special Time

These are extracts from prayers for the Fast:

"These are, O my God, the days whereon Thou didst enjoin Thy servants to observe the Fast...Thou hast endowed every hour of these days with a special virtue..."

"...Blessed is he that observeth the fast wholly for Thy sake, and with absolute detachment from all things except Thee..."

"Glory be to Thee, O Lord My God! These are the days whereon Thou hast bidden all men to observe the fast, that through it they may purify their souls...Grant, O my Lord, that this fast may become a river of life-giving waters and may yield the virtue with which Thou hast endowed it....Do not bring our fasts to an end with this fast, O my Lord...Do Thou accept all that we have done for love of Thee..."

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