

# The Fast

## A Compilation from the Bahá'í Writings

by Darren Hiebert  
(Revision: 22 March 2010)

### Selections from Bahá'u'lláh

We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. He hath exempted from this those who are weak from illness or age, as a bounty from His Presence, and He is the Forgiving, the Generous.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ¶ 10)*

God hath exempted women who are in their courses from obligatory prayer and fasting.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ¶ 13)*

O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Rúz as a feast. Thus hath the Day-Star of Utterance shone forth above the horizon of the Book as decreed by Him Who is the Lord of the beginning and the end. Let the days in excess of the months be placed before the month of fasting. We have ordained that these, amid all nights and days, shall be the manifestations of the letter Há, and thus they have not been bounded by the limits of the year and its months. It behoveth the people of Baha, throughout these days, to provide good cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy, and with joy and exultation to hail and glorify their Lord, to sing His praise and magnify His Name; and when they end—these days of giving that precede the season of restraint—let them enter upon the Fast. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Lord of all mankind. The traveller, the ailing, those who are with child or giving suck, are not bound by the Fast; they have been exempted by God as a token of His grace. He, verily, is the Almighty, the Most Generous.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ¶ 16)*

QUESTION: Concerning the definition of a journey.<sup>1</sup>

ANSWER: The definition of a journey is nine hours by the clock. Should the traveller stop in a place, anticipating that he will stay there for no less than one month by the Bayán reckoning, it is incumbent on him to keep the Fast; but if for less than one month, he is exempt from fasting. If he arriveth during the Fast at a place where he is to stay one month according to the Bayán, he should not observe the Fast till three days have elapsed, thereafter keeping it throughout the remainder of its course; but if he come to his home, where he hath heretofore been permanently resident, he must commence his fast upon the first day after his arrival.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, #22)*

QUESTION: Should a person wish to fast at a time other than in the month of 'Alá', is this permissible or not; and if he hath vowed or pledged himself to such a fast, is this valid and acceptable?

ANSWER: The ordinance of fasting is such as hath already been revealed. Should someone pledge himself, however, to offer up a fast to God, seeking in this way the fulfilment of a wish, or to realize some other aim, this is permissible, now as heretofore. Howbeit, it is God's wish, exalted be His glory, that vows and pledges be directed to such objectives as will profit mankind.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, #71)*

QUESTION: Concerning the limit of fasting for someone travelling on foot.

---

1 This relates to the minimum duration of a journey which exempts the traveller from fasting

ANSWER: The limit is set at two hours. If this is exceeded, it is permissible to break the Fast.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, #75)*

QUESTION: Concerning observance of the Fast by people engaged in hard labour during the month of fasting.

ANSWER: Such people are excused from fasting; however, in order to show respect to the law of God and for the exalted station of the Fast, it is most commendable and fitting to eat with frugality and in private.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, #76)*

QUESTION: Concerning fasting and obligatory prayer by the sick.

ANSWER: In truth, I say that obligatory prayer and fasting occupy an exalted station in the sight of God. It is, however, in a state of health that their virtue can be realized. In time of ill-health it is not permissible to observe these obligations; such hath been the bidding of the Lord, exalted be His glory, at all times. Blessed be such men and women as pay heed, and observe His precepts. All praise be unto God, He who hath sent down the verses and is the Revealer of undoubted proofs!

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, #93)*

### **The Fast is a means of understanding the sufferings of others**

All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants, and enjoined on them the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and sufferings of the destitute.

*(The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting, Selection II.)*

### **The Fast is a means of sharing the sufferings of the Manifestation of God**

These are Thy servants, O my Lord, who have entered with Thee in this, the Most Great Prison, who have kept the fast within its walls according to what Thou hadst commanded them in the Tablets of Thy decree and the Books of Thy behest. Send down, therefore, upon them what will thoroughly purge them of all Thou abhorrest, that they may be wholly devoted to Thee, and may detach themselves entirely from all except Thyself.

*(Prayers and Meditations, p. 145)*

### **The Manifestation of God is often portrayed in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh as the Horizon from where the Sun of Reality appears to the world**

...O concourse of divines! Hear ye not the shrill voice of My Most Exalted Pen? See ye not this Sun that shineth in refulgent splendour above the All-Glorious Horizon?

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ¶ 41)*

...We grieved to see thee circle round Our Name, whilst unaware of Us, though We were before thy face. Open thine eyes, that thou mayest behold this glorious Vision, and recognize Him Whom thou invokest in the daytime and in the night season, and gaze on the Light that shineth above this luminous Horizon.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ¶ 85)*

Should differences arise amongst you over any matter, refer it to God while the Sun still shineth above the horizon of this Heaven and, when it hath set, refer ye to whatsoever hath been sent down by Him. This, verily, is sufficient unto the peoples of the world. Say: Let not your hearts be perturbed, O people, when the glory of My Presence is withdrawn, and the ocean of My utterance is stilled. In My presence amongst you there is a wisdom, and in My absence there is yet another, inscrutable to all but God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing.

*(Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ¶ 53)*

## **The Fast is symbolic of the detachment demanded of the believers during the appearance of the Manifestation**

It behoveth the people of Baha to die to the world and all that is therein, to be so detached from all earthly things that the inmates of Paradise may inhale from their garment the sweet smelling savor of sanctity, that all the peoples of the earth may recognize in their faces the brightness of the All-Merciful, and that through them may be spread abroad the signs and tokens of God, the Almighty, the All-Wise.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 100)*

Know ye that trials and tribulations have, from time immemorial, been the lot of the chosen Ones of God and His beloved, and such of His servants as are detached from all else but Him, they whom neither merchandise nor traffic beguile from the remembrance of the Almighty, they that speak not till He hath spoken, and act according to His commandment.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 129)*

...Great is the blessedness that awaiteth thee, O My servant, for thou hast attained unto that which none hath attained, except such as have detached themselves from all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth, and who are the emblems of true detachment.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 149)*

Amongst the proofs demonstrating the truth of this Revelation is this, that in every age and Dispensation, whenever the invisible Essence was revealed in the person of His Manifestation, certain souls, obscure and detached from all worldly entanglements, would seek illumination from the Sun of Prophethood and Moon of Divine guidance, and would attain unto the Divine Presence.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 179)*

...They whose hearts are turned towards Him Who is the Object of the adoration of the entire creation must needs, in this Day, pass beyond and be sanctified from all created things, visible and invisible. If they arise to teach My Cause, they must let the breath of Him Who is the Unconstrained, stir them and must spread it abroad on the earth with high resolve, with minds that are wholly centered in Him, and with hearts that are completely detached from and independent of all things, and with souls that are sanctified from the world and its vanities. It behoveth them to choose as the best provision for their journey reliance upon God, and to clothe themselves with the love of their Lord, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious. If they do so, their words shall influence their hearers.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 200-201)*

We beseech God that He may graciously vouchsafe His grace unto all men, and enable them to attain the knowledge of Him and of themselves. By My life! Whoso hath known Him shall soar in the immensity of His love, and shall be detached from the world and all that is therein.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 205)*

By the righteousness of Mine own Self! Great, immeasurably great is this Cause! Mighty, inconceivably mighty is this Day! Blessed indeed is the man that hath forsaken all things, and fastened his eyes upon Him Whose face hath shed illumination upon all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 245)*

Should any man, in this Day, arise and, with absolute detachment from all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth, set his affections on Him Who is the Day Spring of God's holy Revelation, he will, verily, be empowered to subdue all created things, through the potency of one of the Names of the Lord, his God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 319)*

## **Selections from 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

Ye had written of the fasting month. Fortunate are ye to have obeyed the commandment of God, and kept this fast during the holy season. 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.

*(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 69-70; #35)*

Beside all this, prayer and fasting is the cause of awakening and mindfulness and conducive to protection and preservation from tests.

*(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 684)*

O Divine Providence! As I am abstaining from bodily desires and not occupied with eating and drinking, even so purify and sanctify my heart from the love of anyone save Thyself, and shield and protect my soul from corrupt desires and satanic qualities, so that my spirit may commune with the breaths of holiness, and fast from the mention of all else besides Thee.

*('Abdu'l-Bahá: Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 18, p. 305; cited in Lights of Guidance, #784)*

The Divine Wisdom in fasting is manifold. Among them is this: As during those days (i.e. the period of fasting which the followers afterward observe) the Manifestation of the Sun of Reality, through Divine inspiration, is engaged in the descent (revealing) of Verses, the instituting of Divine Law and the arrangement of teachings, through excessive occupation and intensive attraction there remains no condition or time for eating and drinking. For example, when His Holiness Moses went to Mount Tur (Sinai) and there engaged in instituting the Law of God, He fasted forty days. For the purpose of awakening and admonishing the people of Israel, fasting was enjoined upon them.

Likewise, His Holiness Christ, in the beginning of instituting the Spiritual Law, the systemizing of the teachings and the arrangement of counsels, for forty days abstained from eating and drinking. In the beginning the disciples and Christians fasted. Later the assemblages of the chief Christians changed fasting into lenten observances.

Likewise, the Koran having descended in the month of Ramazan, fasting during that month became a duty.

In like manner His Holiness the Supreme (The Bab), in the beginning of the Manifestation through the excessive effect of descending verses, passed days in which His nourishment was reduced to tea only.

Likewise, the Blessed Beauty (Baha'o'llah), when busy with instituting the Diving Teachings and during the days when the Verses (The Word of God) descended continuously, through the great effect of the Verses and the throbbing of the heart, took no food except the least amount.

The purpose is this: In order to follow the Diving Manifestations and for the purpose of admonition and the commemoration of their state, it became incumbent upon the people to fast during those days. For every sincere soul who has a beloved longs to experience that state in which his beloved is. If his beloved is in a state of sorrow, he desires sorrow; if in a state of trouble, he desires trouble.

Now, since in the Millennial Day, His Holiness the Supreme (The Bab) fasted many days, and the Blessed Beauty (Baha'o'llah) took but little food or drink, it becomes necessary that the friends should follow that example....

*(Table Talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, by Mrs. Corrine True: Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 18, p.305; cited in Lights of Guidance, #779)*

## **Selections from Shoghi Effendi**

As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God. They act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development.

The ordinance of fasting is, as is the case with these three prayers (obligatory) a spiritual and vital obligation enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh upon every believer who has attained the age of fifteen....

The fasting period, which lasts nineteen days starting as a rule from the second of March every year and ending on the twentieth of the same month, involves complete abstention from food and drink from sunrise till sunset. It is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. Its significance and purpose are, therefore,

fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.

*(Directives from the Guardian, p. 27-29)*

If one eats unconsciously during the fasting hours, this is not breaking the Fast as it is an accident.

*(Directives from the Guardian, p. 27-29)*

If, however, you find your health affected by keeping the Fast the Guardian would advise you to consult a physician, and if he tells you you are unable to fast then of course, you should abstain from doing so.

*(Unfolding Destiny, p. 440)*

Keeping the Fast is enjoined upon all Bahá'ís, regardless of nationality; it has a very salutary effect both physically and spiritually, and the friends should realise Bahá'u'lláh never would have instituted it if it were detrimental to the health.

*(Unfolding Destiny, p. 444)*

...Those unwarranted practices, in connection with the sacrament of baptism, of communion, of confession of sins, of asceticism, of priestly domination, of elaborate ceremonials, of holy war and of polygamy, have one and all been rigidly suppressed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh; whilst the rigidity and rigor of certain observances, such as fasting, which are necessary to the devotional life of the individual, have been considerably abated.

*(World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 22)*

As to your question regarding the Fast: if there is any doubt in the mind of a person as to whether it will really be bad for that person's health to keep it, the best doctor's advice should be obtained. But generally speaking most people can keep it, anywhere in the world, with no detriment to their health. It is very good for the health and, once one forms the habit, each year it becomes easier to keep it unless one is rundown. No one is obliged to keep it if it really harms them.

*(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 14, 1947; cited in Lights of Guidance, #778)*

## **Prayers of Bahá'u'lláh**

These are, O my Lord, the days in which Thou hast bidden Thy servants to observe the fast. Blessed is he that observeth the fast wholly for Thy sake and with absolute detachment from all things except Thee. Assist me and assist them, O my Lord, to obey Thee and to keep Thy precepts.

*(Prayers and Meditations, p. 10)*

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 and rid themselves of all attachment to any one but Thee, and that out of their hearts may ascend that which will be worthy of the court of Thy majesty and may well beseem the seat of the revelation of Thy oneness. Grant, O my Lord, that this fast may become a river of life-giving waters and may yield the virtue wherewith Thou hast endowed it. Cleanse Thou by its means the hearts of Thy servants...

...And yet I beseech Thee ... to give me to drink of the wine of Thy mercy and of the pure beverage of Thy favor...

I moreover entreat Thee, O my God, to rain down, from the heaven of Thy will and the clouds of Thy mercy, that which will cleanse us from the noisome savors of our transgressions, O Thou Who hast called Thyself the God of Mercy! Thou art, verily, the Most Powerful, the All-Glorious, the Beneficent.

...Cause me to taste, O my Lord, the divine sweetness of Thy remembrance and praise. I swear by Thy might! Whosoever tasteth of its sweetness will rid himself of all attachment to the world and all that is therein, and will set his face towards Thee, cleansed from the remembrance of any one except Thee.

*(Prayers and Meditations, p. 79-83)*

I beseech Thee, O my God, by the splendor of Thy luminous brow and the brightness of the light of Thy countenance, which shineth from the all-highest horizon, to attract me by the fragrance of Thy raiment, and make me drink of the choice wine of Thine utterance.

...I beseech Thee, O my God, by the fire of Thy love which drove sleep from the eyes of Thy chosen

ones and Thy loved ones, and by their remembrance and praise of Thee at the hour of dawn, to number me with such as have attained unto that which Thou hast sent down in Thy Book and manifested through Thy will....

*(Prayers and Meditations, p. 289-292)*

These are, O my God, the days whereon Thou didst enjoin Thy servants to observe the fast. With it Thou didst adorn the preamble of the Book of Thy Laws revealed unto Thy creatures, and didst deck forth the Repositories of Thy commandments in the sight of all who are in Thy heaven and all who are on Thy earth. Thou hast endowed every hour of these days with a special virtue, inscrutable to all except Thee, Whose knowledge embraceth all created things. Thou hast, also, assigned unto every soul a portion of this virtue in accordance with the Tablet of Thy decree and the Scriptures of Thine irrevocable judgment. Every leaf of these Books and Scriptures Thou hast, moreover, allotted to each one of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.

For Thine ardent lovers Thou hast, according to Thy decree, reserved, at each daybreak, the cup of Thy remembrance, O Thou Who art the Ruler of rulers! These are they who have been so inebriated with the wine of Thy manifold wisdom that they forsake their couches in their longing to celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy virtues, and flee from sleep in their eagerness to approach Thy presence and partake of Thy bounty. Their eyes have, at all times, been bent upon the Day-Spring of Thy loving-kindness, and their faces set towards the Fountain-Head of Thine inspiration. Rain down, then, upon us and upon them from the clouds of Thy mercy what beseemeth the heaven of Thy bounteousness and grace.

Lauded be Thy name, O my God! This is the hour when Thou hast unlocked the doors of Thy bounty before the faces of Thy creatures, and opened wide the portals of Thy tender mercy unto all the dwellers of Thine earth. I beseech Thee, by all them whose blood was shed in Thy path, who, in their yearning over Thee, rid themselves from all attachment to any of Thy creatures, and who were so carried away by the sweet savors of Thine inspiration that every single member of their bodies intoned Thy praise and vibrated to Thy remembrance, not to withhold from us the things Thou hast irrevocably ordained in this Revelation—a Revelation the potency of which hath caused every tree to cry out what the Burning Bush had aforetime proclaimed unto Moses, Who conversed with Thee, a Revelation that hath enabled every least pebble to resound again with Thy praise, as the stones glorified Thee in the days of Muhammad, Thy Friend.

These are the ones, O my God, whom Thou hast graciously enabled to have fellowship with Thee and to commune with Him Who is the Revealer of Thyself. The winds of Thy will have scattered them abroad until Thou didst gather them together beneath Thy shadow, and didst cause them to enter into the precincts of Thy court. Now that Thou hast made them to abide under the shade of the canopy of Thy mercy, do Thou assist them to attain what must befit so august a station. Suffer them not, O my Lord, to be numbered with them who, though enjoying near access to Thee, have been kept back from recognizing Thy face, and who, though meeting with Thee, are deprived of Thy presence.

These are Thy servants, O my Lord, who have entered with Thee in this, the Most Great Prison, who have kept the fast within its walls according to what Thou hadst commanded them in the Tablets of Thy decree and the Books of Thy behest. Send down, therefore, upon them what will thoroughly purge them of all Thou abhorrest, that they may be wholly devoted to Thee, and may detach themselves entirely from all except Thyself.

Rain down, then, upon us, O my God, that which beseemeth Thy grace and befitteth Thy bounty. Enable us, then, O my God, to live in remembrance of Thee and to die in love of Thee, and supply us with the gift of Thy presence in Thy worlds hereafter—worlds which are inscrutable to all except Thee. Thou art our Lord and the Lord of all worlds, and the God of all that are in heaven and all that are on earth.

Thou beholdest, O my God, what hath befallen Thy dear ones in Thy days. Thy glory beareth me witness! The voice of the lamentation of Thy chosen ones hath been lifted up throughout Thy realm. Some were ensnared by the infidels in Thy land, and were hindered by them from having near access to Thee and from attaining the court of Thy glory. Others were able to approach Thee, but were kept back from beholding Thy face. Still others were permitted, in their eagerness to look upon Thee, to enter the precincts of Thy court, but they allowed the veils of the imaginations of Thy creatures and the wrongs inflicted by the oppressors among Thy people to come in between them and Thee.

This is the hour, O my Lord, which Thou hast caused to excel every other hour, and hast related it to the choicest among Thy creatures. I beseech Thee, O my God, by Thy Self and by them, to ordain in the course of this year what shall exalt Thy loved ones. Do Thou, moreover, decree within this year what will enable the Day-Star of Thy power to shine brightly above the horizon of Thy glory, and to illuminate, by Thy sovereign might, the whole world.

Render Thy Cause victorious, O my Lord, and abase Thou Thine enemies. Write down, then, for us the good of this life and of the life to come. Thou art the Truth, Who knoweth the secret things. No God is there but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bountiful.

*(Prayers and Meditations, p. 143-146)*