

The Bahá'í Fast

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

One of the most important spiritual disciplines for Bahá'ís is an annual fast. This Bahá'í law is enjoined on all believers once they attain the age of 15 and until they reach the age of 70. Those who are ill, pregnant, nursing, traveling, engaged in heavy labor, and some other conditions, are exempt from fasting, as detailed in Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or *The Most Holy Book*.



Continental Bahá'í House of Worship for Europe, near Frankfurt, in Langenhain, Germany

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the importance of the Bahá'í Fast.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations on the following pages, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
Have two participants take turns reading the quotation out loud so that it is read twice.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*
 - A. If anyone would like to have better understanding of a word used in the quotation, now is the time to look up its substitute phrase, definition or synonym, which can be found in the boxes below each quotation. Read the substitute phrase, definition or synonym out loud so everyone can hear.
 - B. Read the sentence again that contains the word you looked up, while **substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition or synonym from the box below the quotation.

C. If anyone would like a better understanding of another word, repeat the process above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.

3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*

Take turns stating each basic fact or truth you can find in the quotation about the Bahá'í Fast.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. 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.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Directives from the Guardian*, pp. 28-29)

abstention: voluntarily withholding oneself
abstinence: voluntarily depriving oneself or refraining
as a rule: generally, disregarding specific instances
carnal: bodily or sensual
character: its distinguishing traits or qualities
desires: cravings for enjoyment or satisfaction
drink: any liquid taken into the mouth for swallowing; "In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, after stating that fasting consists of abstinence from food and drink, further indicates that smoking is a form of 'drink'. In Arabic the verb 'drink' applies equally to smoking". (*KA*, Notes, p. 179)
essentially: of its inner character or essence
fasting: "Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown..." (Bahá'u'lláh, *KA*, p. 25)
food: any solid material taken into the mouth for swallowing
forces: powers and strengths of influence and effectiveness
fundamentally: at its basis or foundation
inner: mental or spiritual
latent: present, but not yet active
meditation: deep reflection or contemplation on ↗

sacred matters
necessary: essential or needed
period: duration of time
prayer: "Prayer is essentially communion between man and God..." (Shoghi Effendi, *DG*, p. 78)
purpose: main aim, reason, or intention
readjustments: corrections or modifications again
recuperation: restoration and regaining of strength
refresh: supply what's necessary to restore loss of strength and liveliness
reinvigorate: bring back the energy and life to
reminder: stimulus for remembering
selfish: excessive or exclusive concern for one's self
significance: quality that makes it important
soul: immortal essence of the rational, spiritual, and emotional self
spiritual: higher, divine, or heavenly oriented
strive: devote serious energy or effort
sunrise: the time the upper portion of the sun appears above the horizon
sunset: the time the upper portion of the sun disappears below the horizon
symbolic: representative, standing for something else

2. *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.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 22)

commanded: ordered and directed
fast: abstain from food and drink [as directed in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*]

maturity: "The age of maturity is fifteen for both men and women." (Bahá'u'lláh, *KA*, p. 113)
ordained: established and enacted
We: used by one in authority to denote himself

3. *These are the ordinances of God that have been set down in the Books and Tablets by His Most Exalted Pen. Hold ye fast unto His statutes and commandments, and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings, have clung to the standards fixed by their own selves, and cast behind their backs the standards laid down by God. Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown, and beware lest desire deprive you of this grace that is appointed in the Book.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 25)

abstain: voluntarily withhold oneself
appointed: officially established and fixed
beware: be on guard and cautious
Book(s): recorded Revelation(s) of God; today, Bahá'u'lláh's Writings
cast: thrown away
clung: held on tightly
commandments: authoritative commands or orders
deprive: take away or withhold from
desire: strong feelings for enjoyment or satisfaction
drink: any liquid taken into the mouth for swallowing; "In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, after stating that fasting consists of abstinence from food and drink, further indicates that smoking is a form of 'drink'. In Arabic the verb 'drink' applies equally to smoking". (*KA*, Notes, p. 179)
Exalted: highly praised, raised to an elevated state, and glorified
fancies: unreal and unreasonable notions invented in the mind
fast: firmly without yielding

fixed: firmly set in the mind
food: any solid material taken into the mouth for swallowing
grace: divine influence that makes you morally pure and strong, gifted out of God's loving-kindness
idle: incapable of worthwhile use or effect [type of]
imaginings: plans, schemes, or beliefs formed in the mind
lest: for fear that
ordinances: ordered practices or laws
Pen: refers to the instrumentation of the Manifestation of God
standards: established rules and models of what is proper and adequate
statutes: fixed laws
sundown: the time the upper portion of the sun disappears below the horizon
sunrise: the time the upper portion of the sun appears above the horizon
Tablets: divinely revealed Scriptures
vain: worthless; meaningless

4. 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.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 27)

constitutes: makes up or forms
development: gradual improvement, advancement, or growth
fasting: abstaining from food and drink [as directed in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* by Bahá'u'lláh]
insure: makes certain and guarantees
law: rules of conduct established and enforced by the authority
pillars: main supports
purify: from fault, blame, or sin, free and cleanse

revive: a return to activity and life from suspension or neglect
soul: immortal essence of the rational, spiritual, and emotional self
steady: constant and uninterrupted
stimulants: agents which produce a temporary increase of vital activity
strengthen: causing added power, efficacy, or vigor
sustain: uphold and maintain the existence of

5. 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, pp. 69-70)

appetites: desires or cravings for gratification
breathings: utterances and inspirations
carried away: moved, swayed, or charmed
characteristics: distinguishing traits, qualities, or properties
commandment: authoritative command or law
fire: liveliness, passion, and enthusiasm
fortunate: lucky for having received of unexpected good
heaven: the Revelation of God; “By ‘heaven’ is meant the heaven of divine Revelation...”
(Bahá’u’lláh, KI, p. 44)
material: physical conduct [of the]
obeyed: carried out or submitted to the ☞

instruction or order of
outer: external or outward
self-restraint: holding back or controlling oneself
self: “...ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on.”
(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in Living the Life, p. 18)
spirit: divine or higher nature
spiritual: divine or heavenly oriented
symbol: behavior that stands for or is representative
token: expression given or shown as a guarantee
withholding: holding back; restraining

6. *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.*

(Bahá’u’lláh, Prayers and Meditations, p. 79)

ascend: proceed from an inferior to a more superior or noble degree
attachment: heart-felt attraction and attention
beseem: seem proper for
bidden: issued an order to
court: abode or surroundings
hearts: nature which becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached
majesty: supreme authority and glory
men: the human race

observe: conform their actions and comply with
oneness: singleness and indivisibility
purify: free and cleanse from fault, blame, or sin
revelation: disclosure and discovery
rid: remove, free, and clear
seat: place where the prevailing condition is
souls: immortal essence of the rational, spiritual, and emotional self
worthy: of sufficient value, deserving

SHARING: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, the one thing that was most outstanding or inspiring and how it made him or her feel. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

The one thing from the quotations that was the most outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

It made me feel _____

Explain _____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A gentle breeze from the testing winds...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. When does the Bahá'í Fast begin each year? _____
2. Bahá'ís are obligated to fast from the age of _____, and are exempt once they attain the age of _____.
3. The Bahá'í Fast consists of abstinence from _____ and _____ from sunrise to sunset.
4. The Bahá'í Fast lasts _____ days.
5. Prayer and _____ are the two pillars that sustain the revealed law of God.
6. Abstaining from food and drink during the Bahá'í fasting period is an outward activity that significantly affects the growth and progress of the individual's soul. The Bahá'í Fast serves to
 - a. refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in the soul.
 - b. act as a stimulant to the soul.
 - c. take some weight off the sole.
 - d. strengthen, revive and purify the soul.
 - e. insure the steady development of the soul.
7. Observance of the daily obligatory prayer and the Bahá'í yearly fast are two personal laws that the Creator has enjoined upon each believer. There are no persons or Bahá'í institutions that monitor or sanction individuals because of their actions with regards to these laws. Fasting and prayer are _____ actions that demonstrate to God, and to oneself, obedience to His law.
 - a. outward
 - b. symbolic
 - c. idle
 - d. token
8. Conditions which exempt one from being obliged to observe the Bahá'ís Fast include illness, pregnancy, nursing, menstruating, traveling and engaging in heavy labor as described in Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws. This book is called _____
9. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *“The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.”*¹ What are the “twin duties”? _____

¹ KA, p. 19

APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read through the following paragraph together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action. When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *“It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....”* Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: *“One could....”*

From your experience in this study class on the Bahá'í Fast, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. *I will make conscious efforts to...* _____

A talk by 'Abdu'l-Bahá...

The following was a talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as recorded by Mrs. Corinne True.

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 Báb], 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 [Bahá'o'lláh], when busy with instituting the Divine 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 Divine 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 joy, he desires joy; if in a state of rest, he desires rest; if in a state of trouble, he desires trouble.

Now, since in this Millennial Day, his holiness the Supreme [the Báb] fasted many days, and the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] took but little food or drink, it becomes necessary that the friends follow that example. For thus saith He in the Tablet of Visitation: “They, the believers, have followed that which they were commanded, for love of Thee.”

This is one wisdom of the wisdoms of fasting.

The second wisdom is this: Fasting is the cause of awakening man. The heart becomes tender and the spirituality of man increases. This is produced by the fact that man's thoughts will be confined to the commemoration of God, and through this awakening and stimulation surely ideal advancements follow.

Third wisdom: Fasting is of two kinds, material and spiritual. The material fasting is abstaining from food or drink, that is, from the appetites of the body. But spiritual, ideal fasting is this, that man abstain from selfish passions, from negligence and from satanic animal traits. Therefore, material fasting is a token of the spiritual fasting. That is: “O God! as I am fasting from the appetites of the body and not occupied with eating and drinking, even so purify and make holy my heart and my life from aught else save Thy Love, and protect and preserve my soul from self-passions and animal traits. Thus may the spirit associate with the Fragrances of Holiness and fast from everything else save Thy mention.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, published in *Star of the West*, Vol. IV, No. 18, p. 305)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. March second
2. fifteen; seventy
3. food; drink
4. nineteen
5. fasting
6. a, b, d, and e
7. a, b, and d
8. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* or *The Most Holy Book*
9. “*recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws*” [Bahá'u'lláh]; and “*to observe every ordinance [law] of Him Who is the Desire of the world*”

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